

CAPE BRETON IN THE LONG  
TWENTIETH CENTURY

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TWENTIETH CENTURY**

Formations and Legacies of Industrial Capitalism

Edited by Lachlan MacKinnon and Andrew Parnaby

 **AU PRESS**



Canadian Committee  
on Labour History

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## Acknowledgements

*Cape Breton in the Long Twentieth Century* was designed around the recognition that those of us living through the first decades of the twenty-first century have experienced a historical rupture from what came before. Witnessing the shockwaves of deindustrialization, which directly impacted Cape Breton and its residents, recent years have also seen the quickening of climate change, the ravages of the global COVID-19 pandemic, and a host of social mobilizations in the face of structural inequity—from Occupy Wall Street to Idle No More and Black Lives Matter. With these shifts in full view, the editors sought to craft a collection that would consider the place of Cape Bretoners in this changing landscape. Drawing upon a national network of researchers whose work touches on the island, this book provides a reconnaissance of Cape Breton's history nearly two decades after its cornerstone industries of coal and steel were closed. The result is a text that reveals the transnational threads that have influenced Cape Breton residents during the long twentieth century and examines some of the ways that islanders have responded to these transformations.

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# Introduction

In March 2020, the last remaining underground coal mine in Atlantic Canada was closed. Located in Donkin, Nova Scotia, on Cape Breton Island, the mine was owned by Kameron Collieries, a subsidiary of the United States–based Cline Group, which also runs coal operations in Alberta, Illinois, and West Virginia, among other ventures. Originally constructed in the early 1980s by the Cape Breton Development Corporation, a federal Crown corporation, but abandoned due to falling coal prices, the Donkin Mine was reopened by Kameron Collieries in 2017, with Nova Scotia Power slated as one of its primary customers. Three years later, as coal prices declined and thirteen reported rock falls triggered concerns over safety, the facility was shut down. The decision, which left 150 miners without work, came and went without significant popular concern.<sup>1</sup> This muted response would have seemed unimaginable to many Cape Bretoners in the early twentieth century, for whom the entire economic foundation of the island's existence was predicated upon the coal and steel industries. Indeed, it was precisely this sort of dependence and disruption that prompted community mobilizations in the 1960s to demand the nationalization of both cornerstone industries.<sup>2</sup> Coal had been mined on the island since the early eighteenth century, while steel started production in the first years of the twentieth century. The absence of widespread concern surrounding the disappearance of the Donkin Mine suggests that a particular moment in the island's history, one shaped deeply by carbon, class, and capitalism, was drawing to a close.

Other indications that the island is passing from an industrial to a deindustrial moment are not hard to find. Demographics tell part of the story. Between 1996 and 2016, the island's population contracted from 158,260 to 134,124 people, or roughly 15 percent. Underway since the 1970s as Cape Bretoners sought better job prospects in manufacturing in Ontario and, until very

recently, the oil patch in Alberta, this demographic decline has slowed in recent years due to the immigration of international students to Sydney, who now make up about 60 percent of the enrolment at the local university.<sup>3</sup> Over roughly the same period, the number of children in public schools in the Cape Breton Victoria Regional Centre for Education—the island’s largest school district—has declined by nearly 70 percent, from 41,286 (1970) to 12,680 (2016) students.<sup>4</sup> Not surprisingly, permanent school closures have proliferated. While resilient communities remain on the island, they are often beset by challenges related to economic marginalization, including domestic violence and opioid addiction, as suggested by the 2006 documentary *Cottonland* and the critically acclaimed 2018 feature film *Werewolf*.<sup>5</sup> In the realm of culture, the experiences of labour that once set the pace of everyday life in the industrial zones have largely slipped into memory, oral history, artistic expression, and even kitsch. In the centre of Sydney, for example—once the island’s “steel city”—an eighty-acre park occupies the site of the former steel plant. The product of a prolonged local struggle for environmental remediation, the park features historical plaques and public art that tell a particular version of the steel story. Bordering the park, many streetscapes are characterized by abandoned houses and crumbling infrastructure, especially in some of Sydney’s oldest working-class neighbourhoods such as Whitney Pier. Meanwhile, across town, a vibrant theatre community often puts working-class stories on the stage to the delight of locals and tourists alike. During the COVID-19 pandemic, one health advisory featured a retro image of a miner’s pit helmet and the message “Wash your hands like a Cape Breton coal miner coming home for dinner.” The end of industry, in other words, has a “half-life.”<sup>6</sup> No longer dominant, its residue is manifested in a wide range of social forms—and it lasts.

It was precisely this sense of being situated at the end of an identifiable historical period—the industrial one—that prompted the two of us to wonder, How might current scholarship help us understand the era that was—now that its broad contours are clear to us? Eric Hobsbawm famously limited his study of the twentieth century to the period from the start of World War I to the collapse of the Soviet Union (1914–91)—thereby positing a “short” twentieth century marked off by politics as an “age of extremes.” We have taken a somewhat different approach to the century—one that centres industrialization/deindustrialization as a broad organizing principle.<sup>7</sup> This approach stretches our sense for the century outside a neat temporal framework and thus

focuses our attention on deep trends that took hold on the island in the early to mid-nineteenth century and matured over the next 125 years. That's our long twentieth century. This approach—moving from a short to a long century—owes much to the work of Giovanni Arrighi, who argued in 1994 that capital accumulation during the 1970s and 1980s was causing unprecedented geographical shifts in productive forces, work, and prosperity. For Arrighi, whose long twentieth century begins with the emergence of American capitalist economic power into a global force, this historical period is based on the combined growth of industrial capitalism and a state apparatus designed to protect and enforce rights to property, commerce, and profit.<sup>8</sup> Edward Ross Dickinson expands on this approach in his recent book, *The World in the Long Twentieth Century: An Interpretive History*, writing that “the period from the mid-nineteenth century to the beginning of the twenty-first is the period in which human societies were re-shaped, in an often chaotic process but in coherent ways by [ecological, technological, and social] forces.”<sup>9</sup> Broadly speaking, this was certainly the case for Cape Breton Island. Our contributors describe, in two discrete sections, the emergence, dominance, and retreat of a particular social and economic order—that of modernist industrial capitalism. And critically, they show how the interplay of the state, cultures, and transnational connections shaped how people navigated these heavy pressures, both individually and collectively.

An island about twice the size of the province of Prince Edward Island, Cape Breton extends outward into the Gulf of St. Lawrence, where that waterway opens into the North Atlantic, a lobster claw-shaped appendage to the Nova Scotia mainland. To casual observers, the island is perhaps best known for the Cabot Trail, located in the Cape Breton Highlands National Park, and the Celtic Colours International Festival. Both are marquee tourist experiences—although a significant golf economy, centred largely on the island's west coast, where fishing, farming, and coal mining once dominated, is fast expanding.<sup>10</sup> As their names suggest—with words like “Highlands” and “Celtic” prominently included—these attractions have capitalized on the island's real and imagined Scottish past and parlayed it into highly successful visitor experiences with international “brand recognition.” As the local newspaper boasted, “New York City-based magazine ‘Travel + Leisure’ . . . ranks Cape Breton as No. 8 on a list of the world's top island destinations.”<sup>11</sup> Yet matching other places in Canada and around the world where “heritage”

and tourism are combined, this public-facing representation of the island masks a more complex and intriguing history.

For the roughly 6,300 Mi'kmaw people who live on the island, Cape Breton is and has always been Unama'ki—one of the seven traditional districts of Mi'kma'ki and historically the seat of the Mi'kmaw Grand Council or *Sante Mawiomi*. Present in the Atlantic region from about 10,600 BCE, the Mi'kmaw first encountered Europeans on a sustained basis in the late fifteenth century, when Basque fishermen—who likely named the island “Cap Breton”—became a regular presence in coastal waters. As the European reconnaissance of the western hemisphere expanded in subsequent decades, an Atlantic world took shape—drawing Unama'ki/Cape Breton more deeply into a zone of colonial exchange that in time spanned the globe. French imperial dreams found concrete expression on the island beginning in 1713 with the establishment of the French-fortified town of Louisbourg. As the eighteenth century shaded into the nineteenth, the wider Atlantic system was reconfigured. The Seven Years War ended the formal French presence on the island and elsewhere, while the American Revolutionary War, the French Revolution, and the Napoleonic Wars reconfigured other empires, notably the British, and redirected global commerce and emigration. By then, French-speaking settlers had returned, and for them, the island became the local site of a broader Acadian diaspora. Tens of thousands of Scottish migrants followed between 1815 and 1838. Looking out from their coastal and rural settlements, the island appeared to be a new world version of the landscape they had left behind: not Unama'ki or Acadie but Ceap Breatainn. Within a single generation of Scottish settlement, however, a process of industrialization began on the island—signalling, from our vantage point, the start of the long twentieth century.<sup>12</sup>

As the chapters that follow illustrate, the people and places linked to these deep histories were drawn into this modernizing orbit in various ways, bringing with them and transmitting forward through subsequent generations particular presences and expectations. Put simply, Unama'ki, Acadie, and Ceap Breatainn persisted, albeit in modified and divergent ways. To borrow from Margaret Conrad and James K. Hiller, the island has been made and remade, imagined and reimaged, over time.<sup>13</sup>

This multilayered understanding of the island throws into stark relief the instability of the conceptual category of “Cape Breton Island.” The generations of historians and archaeologists linked to the Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Site—itsself a product of the island's turn to tourism in the face of

industrial collapse—understood this notion especially well. Early scholarship from this group, which included A. J. B. Johnston, Christopher Moore, Ken Donovan, and Sandy Balcom, placed a strong emphasis on the social history of French officials, soldiers, and fishing families while positioning the rise and fall of the fortress within a broader colony to nation narrative—one suitable for a national historic site under construction beginning in the 1960s amid the rise of policies of biculturalism that recognized the persistence of French-speaking cultures within Canada.<sup>14</sup>

Over time, this broad scholarly emphasis within the Cape Breton Field Unit of Parks Canada shifted from a nationalist to an Atlantic world framework, tracking one of the key trends reshaping the study of the colonial era in the region generally.<sup>15</sup> As a result, the complexities of transatlantic influences, French-Indigenous relations, gender and identity dynamics, and slavery have come to the fore and thus challenged the relevance of the singular bounded category of “Île Royale” in the past and its value as a device to organize historical interpretation in the present. Historian Anne Marie Lane Jonah’s careful comparative consideration of the lives of the Guinea-born slave Marie Marguerite Rose and Acadian Jeanne Dugas—both of whom lived and worked at Louisbourg—underscores this point well. Their experiences, Lane Jonah concludes, “demonstrate the complexity of the community and the inadequacy of the ‘two founding nations’ narrative. Historians have pushed their research beyond the most readily available records, such as official correspondence, to be able to go past the traditional political history engrained with power, wealth, and gender biases.”<sup>16</sup> The specific interpretive dilemmas presented by the category-stretching lives of Rose and Dugas are emblematic of the challenges of conceptualizing “pre-Confederation” Atlantic Canadian history generally. Where and how should the “geographic . . . and temporal lines of inquiry . . . be drawn?” asks Jerry Bannister in “Atlantic Canada in an Atlantic World?”<sup>17</sup>

Robert Morgan was attuned to the different ways people defined their island home historically and the difficulties this presented for the historian drawn to the analytical category of “Cape Breton Island.” A highly influential writer, archivist, and popular historian, Morgan’s two-volume, empirically driven *Rise Again!* argues that the island’s history represented a progressive effort at identity creation. The title of the book—as local readers understood—said it all. “Rise Again” is also the title of a song written in 1984 by Sydney-born songwriter Leon Dubinsky for the *Rise and Follies of Cape Breton Island*, a

musical theatre review that emerged in response to the island's economic difficulties.<sup>18</sup> Popularized by the Rankin Family, the song offers a rousing call for Cape Bretoners to overcome adversity; it is—arguably—the island's unofficial anthem. For Morgan, then, the history of Cape Breton Island was best explained as the incremental realization of a common, collective sense of self, a narrative in which the multiethnic, multicultural, multiclass residents came to embody a shared spirit as “Cape Bretoners” distinct and apart from Canadians, Maritimers, or Mainlanders.<sup>19</sup>

Elements of this perspective were first advanced by Ken Donovan in “Reflections on Cape Breton Culture,” which was published in 1990 as part of a collection of essays titled *The Island*.<sup>20</sup> In that essay, Donovan argued that since the 1960s, a generalized, shared sense of being a “Cape Bretoner” had emerged on the island, one fashioned out of a widely shared Anglo-Celtic ancestry, common experiences of hardship, and determination to remain on an island that had rarely made life easy for anybody, whatever one's background. Viewed broadly, both Morgan and Donovan were on to something: a meaningful collective Cape Breton identity did emerge in the 1960s and found expression in a wide range of forms, notably the community responses to the collapse of industry at the same time.<sup>21</sup> Traditional music, art and craft, and literature carried some of this sensibility forward. Ronald Caplan's superlative oral history project, *Cape Breton's Magazine*, which ran from 1972 to 1999, provides an excellent tangible example of this lingering effect. Yet as our work on the end of the steel industry reveals, that collective sensibility was highly contingent on the economic crisis of the time and had limited reach outside the predominantly white population of the industrial communities. Moreover, without a common dependence on a shared way of life—coal or steel, for example—or an easily identified external enemy, that sensibility has changed over time, just as earlier attachments to and understandings of the island have done. “We take too readily to heart those interpretations which flatter ourselves,” Cape Breton historian Don MacGillivray wrote in 1985 while reflecting on the art of Ellison Robertson, “declining to deal with or make room for those which are more deeply questioning and ultimately more honest.”<sup>22</sup>

How then to explain or “make room” for the ways in which the island has been made and remade, imagined and reimagined over time? Variations of this question face all historians as they engage with their scholarly and political preconceptions, various historiographical traditions, and the interpretive potential of the evidence they have amassed. Our approach is rooted



in large measure in the broad historiographical traditions in which we have been socialized as scholars—deindustrialization, labour and working class, and regional history. Part of the answer also lies in the scope of the individual chapters that follow. Our “call for papers” for this collection was wide open—anything that focused on the island was welcome. To our surprise and delight, most of the submissions touched upon the broad sway of industrial capitalism in some way. Had the contributors engaged with environmental history, for example, our parameters would have shifted toward the Anthropocene and incorporated longer chronologies of time, geology, evolution, and energy regimes—a framework that Claire Campbell has written about in the context of Atlantic Canada.<sup>23</sup> As our earlier reference to Eric Hobsbawm suggests, we have found an older set of conceptual categories derived from the British Marxist tradition to be especially useful in navigating the intricacies presented by the chapters in this collection: notions of emergent, residual, and dominant cultures. Raymond Williams effectively describes the first two of these concepts in his 1977 *Marxism and Literature*: “The ‘residual’ . . . has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process . . . as an effective element of the present. . . . By ‘emergent,’ I mean first that new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationships are continually being created. But it is exceptionally difficult to distinguish between those which are really elements of some new phase of the dominant culture . . . and those which are substantively alternative or oppositional to it.”<sup>24</sup> “Dominant” culture, contrarily, is composed of both emergent and residual elements. This approach owes a debt to the Gramscian notion of cultural hegemony—the commonsensical support for the status quo produced by the dominance of a given group in society.<sup>25</sup> It is not, however, all-encompassing. Williams reminds us, “It is a fact about the modes of domination that they select from and consequently exclude the full range of human practice.”<sup>26</sup> Dominant culture is defined by the prevailing set of social and economic relations; it can be challenged or made absent from the private or metaphysical spheres, for example, or also through individual and collective action based on alternative or oppositional visions of the future. Indeed, it is from within such places that challenges to the dominant mode frequently emerge.

Sometimes the interplay of emergent, residual, and dominant cultures can be glimpsed just by walking the streetscapes in the contemporary post-industrial zones of Cape Breton Island. Plummer and Ross Avenues in New

Waterford, named for Dominion Coal Company managers, now traverse a town without a single remaining colliery. Disco Street and Vulcan Avenue in Sydney, signalling the iron and steel industry, now lead toward a community green space instead of the hulking integrated steel mill. Located in the city's historically working-class Ashby neighbourhood, Cornwallis Street, originally named after the colonial founder of Halifax, was recently renamed "Legacy Street" at the behest of Mi'kmaw activists. Cornwallis, of course, was responsible for the "scalping proclamation" that the British colonial government enacted against the Mi'kmaq population of the region.<sup>27</sup> On a clear day, it is possible to stand on the former Cornwallis Street and see the Mi'kmaw community of Membertou, which was once located on Sydney Harbour before being moved by the state to its current location in 1926. Over the past three decades, Membertou has emerged as a consequential local and regional actor by consistently challenging the authority of municipal, provincial, and federal authorities over its day-to-day operations. Persistent treaty memories rooted in the eighteenth century, Indigenous language revitalization, and creative leadership have provided the grit upon which the community's resurgence has found traction. Viewed broadly, the contrast between these places is striking: as the fortunes of former blue-collar areas such as New Waterford and parts of Ashby have waned, the political and economic presence of Membertou—once derided as an impediment to modern life—has surged. Here as elsewhere the industrial moment—as Fred Burrill has noted—was also a settler moment.<sup>28</sup> That relationship is now changing in a drastic fashion: as the dominant ebbs, the residual and emergent cultures flow forward.

This sense of the past has helped us frame Cape Breton in the long twentieth century. Our thinking is represented well by the image on the book's cover, which in our imagination evokes the changing Cape Breton landscape and the idea of generational change. In a vintage car, the driver and his passenger, maybe retirees, surveil the legacies of the long twentieth century as they travel to the Cabot Trail and reflect upon the changes they have witnessed over the decades—both formations and legacies. Inside this volume, our contributors describe, in two discrete parts, the emergence, dominance, and retreat of a particular social and economic order—that of modernist industrial capitalism. In part 1, "Formations," the chapters explore the changing fabric of Cape Breton's economy and culture after the industrial boom of the 1860s. This includes how settler and Indigenous cultures were affected by and responded to these massive changes. In part 2, "Legacies," we delve more deeply into the

role of the state in both cementing the industrial order and preparing for its change from a dominant into a residual culture form. This transition occurs within the context of the global industrial crisis of the late twentieth century, the concurrent turn to the tourist economy, and the ongoing deindustrialization of the island, all of which continue to impact the lives of residents.

There is a rich and illuminating body of scholarship dedicated to Cape Breton's industrial past, and this collection is indebted to it. Part and parcel of the broader social history revolution of the late 1960s and 1970s that drew attention to neglected peoples and regions, Del Muiise, Michael Earle, Don MacGillivray, Ian McKay, and David Frank wrote extensively about the origins of Cape Breton's working class, the character of class conflict, and the dynamics of labour politics—specifically its distinctive radical expressions. Frank's magisterial biography of coal miner and communist James Bryson McLachlan, who championed the cause of the coal miners for more than three decades in the early twentieth century, is perhaps the best-known example of the scholarship.<sup>29</sup> In contrast, scholars studying rural Cape Breton challenged the sometimes too-neat Marxian explanations of nineteenth-century urbanization and proletarianization of rural populations. Rather than existing simply as a population of rural agrarians whose class positions were deterministically shaped by the rapid growth of coal and steel—according to authors such as Rusty Bitterman and Danny Samson—settler residents of rural Cape Breton experienced a more complicated process of class formation. In this sense, they crafted their own worlds and impacted the way in which the state of Nova Scotia came to respond to social, economic, and cultural transition. As Danny Samson argues, “The making of modernity in rural Nova Scotia was a fragmented and contested process and . . . distinct class interests led and defined a series of debates on the future direction of social development in the province. . . . While capitalist modernity emerged within the countryside, it did not do so naturally, inevitably, or unopposed.”<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, rural Cape Breton in the early and mid-nineteenth century was also defined by the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous lands, as European settlers squatted upon and were thereafter assigned legal rights to Mi'kmaq territory.<sup>31</sup>

While this collection represents an addition to this existing literature, there are several ways in which framing the island's history through the long twentieth century signals a departure from the guiding debates of earlier scholarship. The first generation of historians who focused on Cape Breton Island were profoundly influenced by the social history turn of the “Acadiensis

School.”<sup>32</sup> Naturally, the underdevelopment thesis featured heavily in these works—frequently focusing on political economy and the myriad ways that Canadian regionalism had promoted growth in the “centre” as opposed to the “periphery.” Rather than relitigating this debate, our authors recognize regional inequality as a baseline and employ the notion as a way of approaching other national and transnational considerations. Moreover, earlier works focused extensively on both immigration and the intellectual influence of organized labour and radical politics on the island’s nascent working class and its culture. Our authors expand upon this in a variety of ways; one positions economic development within the context of a cultural Anglosphere, while others explore the influence of Black nationalism and rights-based discourse on Cape Breton culture and identity. This collection also seeks explicitly to centre the experiences of communities and cultures that have been under-represented in the writing of twentieth-century Cape Breton history. Certainly, the literature on the island’s history has not been bereft of excellent work on race, gender, class, and ethnicity—but it is our goal to centre these histories alongside those that explore regional political economy or the white working class, which have both traditionally garnered the lion’s share of scholarly attention. In this sense, our authors bring to the foreground stories of Black steelworkers and their families in Whitney Pier, the cultural activities of the Acadian ethnic minority, and the experiences of the Mi’kmaq people in the industrial zones through the long twentieth century.

Our two guiding parts are meant to convey a sense of modernist industrial capitalism’s influence as a broad field of force and activity beginning in the mid-nineteenth century and the range of accommodations and adaptations that emerged as its power waned after World War II. Don Nerbas anchors part 1 with his discussion of the Cape Breton economy during the 1860s, when a boom in the coal industry marked a period of rapid expansion. In contrast to earlier literature, which signalled the end of the monopoly of the General Mining Association (GMA) as launching a period of free-market growth, Nerbas argues cogently that industrial development during the period was, in fact, predicated upon a deeply engrained set of colonial understandings of economic activity. For our purposes, this effectively connects the emergent forces of industrial capitalism in Canada to the residual influences of the traditional staples economy and the early coal industry that preceded it. The reach of empire can also be detected in the analysis provided by John G. Reid, which provides a bottom-up examination of leisure in an industrializing

context; cricket, in his study, is explored as a space wherein gender, class, and racial identities were challenged and asserted in early twentieth-century Cape Breton.

Claudine Bonner, Ronald Labelle, and Martha Walls each take a closer look at the ways in which the dominance of industrial capitalism affected, was understood, and was challenged by three distinctive groups in Cape Breton. Bonner examines the formation of the St. Philips African Orthodox Church and the Universal Negro Improvement Association Hall in the working-class neighbourhood of Whitney Pier to reveal assertions of collective Black identity in the industrial city of Sydney. Labelle focuses on Acadian communities and identities in Industrial Cape Breton beginning in the nineteenth century and reflects on the bittersweet nature of Acadian national identity. Despite the strong efforts of the community, much of the cultural heritage of Acadian groups in the island's industrial communities was subject to assimilation. Walls's chapter describes the ways in which Indigenous peoples, especially women, were singled out as specific barriers to "progress" as the industrial era matured. Central to her study is the notorious expropriation of the King's Road Reserve in Sydney, which was later renamed Membertou.

David Frank's contribution introduces part 2 by considering the case of C. B. Wade, research director for District 26 of the United Mineworkers. By addressing the emergence of industrial legality in the 1940s and 1950s, his study provides a bridge between the collection's two sections. Wade grappled intellectually and politically with the consequences of modernist industrial capitalism while working within a labour movement that was increasingly satisfied to accommodate the dominant culture. In the context of the Cold War, Wade's marginalization suggests the frustration of the radical culture that the coal miners had developed over many decades. This foreshadows some of the challenges examined in later chapters. Ken Donovan's contribution contextualizes Cape Breton's history during the mid-twentieth century in terms of global conflict. In tracing the transatlantic experiences of a Dutch war bride, Donovan reflects upon the conditions of poverty in the wartime Netherlands and in Ingonish, Cape Breton, and considers how one woman's experience conformed to or challenged expectations of rural women on the island. Donovan's sensitive portrayal also reminds us that, despite the broad sway of modern industrial life emanating from Cape Breton County and elsewhere, communities "down north" retained distinctive patterns of life, labour, and loss. Not everyone was on the move to Sydney, Halifax, Toronto,

Fort McMurray, or the “Boston states.” Indeed, history looks different from the countryside.<sup>33</sup>

Like Bonner, Labelle, and Walls, Heather Sparling examines how a distinctive population on the island handled the protracted socio-economic changes of the twentieth century in cultural terms. Focusing on Cape Breton’s Gaelic community, Sparling highlights the roles that cultural workers played in the collection, preservation, and transmission of Gaelic song through informal and formal networks of association and across time and space. In this way, Sparling suggests, cultural workers—who came from inside and outside the island’s Gaelic communities—looked both backward to a historical moment when Gaelic song and language was a lived reality in rural and (to a lesser extent) urban life on the island and forward to a period when the same cultural expressions provided the basis for a burgeoning tourist industry that placed a high price on authenticity. In the next chapters of the collection, Lachlan MacKinnon, Will Langford, Anne-Louise Semple, and Del Muise offer contrasting views of the island’s economic transition in the latter years of the “long twentieth century.” MacKinnon’s chapter focuses on the industrial economy in decline, homing in on a moment of conflict in the Cape Breton coal mines—the 1981 coal strike. In this account, MacKinnon reveals the changing nature of work in the deindustrializing coal mines, generational differences affecting miners and their union, and the significant pressures faced by the island’s storied industrial working class in the twilight of the long twentieth century. Langford’s piece interrogates the actions of the “development state” in Cape Breton after the 1960s—specifically, efforts to expand aquaculture in the Bras d’Or Lake. Importantly, he reflects upon the different meanings that these efforts held for Indigenous and settler communities, noting moments of conflict and acquiescence between the two groups. Muise and Semple explore this economic transition in the context of the island’s annual Celtic Colours festival, reflecting upon this annual event as a tool of a particular mode of state- and arts-led economic development.

Thinking about Cape Breton’s history in the long twentieth century presents an opportunity to reflect upon the significance of this collection for the field more broadly. The ways in which people on the island engaged in their economic practices and social world-building were heavily dependent upon which island they imagined themselves to inhabit. Cape Breton Island, Unama’ki, Île Royale, Ceap Breatainn—each came with its own set of social understandings and relationships. Of course, this is true of any

settler colonial place; in all of these relations, there exist the underpinning violence of the structural displacement of Indigenous peoples, the importation and growth of industrial capitalism, and the gendered and racial dimensions of life in twentieth-century Canada. Further to this, the collection reveals how various groups dealt with the rise and fall of the industrial order. Industrialization prompted a historical moment wherein life for many residents on the island was shaped around the political economy of coal and steel. With the structural system of modernist industrial capitalism in full retreat, the remaining residents of Cape Breton have turned their collective attention to what lies ahead.

In doing so they remind us of the various ways that capitalism is routinely reformulated and reconstructed in available spaces over time. If one form of modernist capitalism has subsided, alternatives are constantly surfacing—whether in the form of successful Indigenous communities, tech-driven knowledge and service economies, speculative bubbles in the (relatively) inexpensive local housing market in the aftermath of the COVID-19 global pandemic, or the much-touted tourist economy. Likewise, the challenges facing us all as we collectively shift closer to a global environmental crisis are coming to bear on daily life on the island. Rising global temperatures and sea levels have produced high rates of coastal erosion, which threaten small communities, local economies, and national historic sites and parks. Weather patterns continue to dramatically shift. Between 2016 and 2022, Cape Breton experienced two extreme weather events—a major flood that destroyed a portion of a neighbourhood in Sydney’s south end and Hurricane Fiona, which left many islanders without electricity for more than a week and crippled infrastructure for much longer. Whatever the shape of Cape Breton’s history in the twenty-first century, it will require the formulation of new identities, solidarities, and practicalities that rise to meet these challenges. Whether or not these things also contain the seeds of their own destruction, they will also certainly produce their own tensions and oppositional impulses—which may spur new opportunities to “Rise Again.” Historians and other scholars, too, are part of this process, not least because we may identify the formations and legacies that proved valuable in the past and may provide support for whatever reconstructions inevitably follow.

## Notes

1. Montgomery-Dupe, "Donkin Mine Closes." As of September 2022, limited production has resumed at the Donkin Mine, although the longer-term future of the mine remains precarious.
2. As Andrew Parnaby writes elsewhere, this was particularly visible in the response in Sydney, NS, to "Black Friday" on 13 October 1967, when DOSCO threatened to close the Sydney Steel Works. See Parnaby, "Roots, Region, and Resistance," 5–31.
3. See Statistics Canada, "Population Estimates," <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1710013701>. A "viability study" commissioned by the Cape Breton Regional Municipality in 2019, which addressed population decline in the former industrial zones of the island, was especially dire. See Thornton, "CBRM Viability Study," 12; Ayers, "CBRM Faces 'Brutal Reality' Unless Population Decline Stemmed."
4. Cape Breton Victoria Regional Centre for Education (CBVRCE), "Business Plan, 2005/2006," 3; CBVRCE, "Long Range Outlook, 2023," 2.
5. Ackerman, "Cottonland"; Brody, "'Werewolf' Burrows."
6. Linkon, *Half-Life*, 3.
7. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, 4.
8. Arrighi, *Long Twentieth Century*, 32.
9. Dickinson, *World in the Long*, 4.
10. MacDonald, "Cape Breton's Cabot Cliffs Named Best New Golf Course in North America."
11. SaltWire Network, "Cape Breton Island Rated No. 1 in Canada, Eighth Worldwide."
12. Broad themes are expertly summarized in Conrad and Hiller, *Atlantic Canada*, 1–89. A sampling of more specific studies includes Harvey, "Scottish Immigration to Cape Breton," 31; Upton, *Micmacs and Colonists*, 81–95; Reid, *Six Crucial Decades*, 61–93; Hornsby, *Nineteenth-Century Cape Breton*; Wicken, *Mi'kmaq Treaties on Trial*; Reid, "Pax Britannica or Pax Indigena?," 669–92; Sable and Francis, *Language of This Land, Mi'kma'ki*; Reid, "Scots, Settler Colonization, and Indigenous Displacement," 178–96; Conrad, *At the Ocean's Edge*.
13. Conrad and Hiller, *Atlantic Canada*, 2.
14. The reflections of the researchers and scholars who participated in the reconstruction provide a good place to start. See Donovan et al., "Forum," 390–426.
15. Bannister, "Atlantic Canada in an Atlantic World?"; Kennedy, "L'Acadie prend sa place dans le monde atlantique," 147–56; Johnston, "Land & Sea & Louisbourg," 209–45.



16. Lane Jonah, "Everywoman's Biography," 157. See also Lane Jonah and Dunham, "Life in a French Atlantic Fishing Village," 63–90; Lane Jonah, "Small Pleasures," 119–37; and Lane Jonah et al., "A Necessary Luxury," 329–44.
17. Bannister, "Atlantic Canada in an Atlantic World?," 4.
18. MacNeil, "Spirit in the Face of Decline."
19. Morgan, *Rise Again!*
20. Donovan, "Reflections on Cape Breton Culture," 1–29.
21. Parnaby, "Roots, Region, and Resistance."
22. MacGillivray, foreword, 1.
23. Campbell, "Privileges and Entanglements," 114–37.
24. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 125.
25. Jackson Lears, "Concept of Cultural Hegemony," 568.
26. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 125.
27. Ayers, "Cornwallis Street in Sydney," <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/cornwallis-street-in-sydney-a-step-closer-to-getting-a-new-name-1.5650650>. On Cornwallis, see Reid, "Three Lives of Edward Cornwallis."
28. Burrill, "Settler Order Framework," 173–97.
29. Frank, *J. B. McLachlan*.
30. Samson, *Spirit of Industry and Improvement*, 5–6.
31. Bitterman, "Hierarchy of the Soil," 43–44.
32. Muise, "Organizing Historical Memory," 50–60.
33. Burrill, *Away*; Beattie, *Obligation and Opportunity*; Lionais et al., "Dependence on Interprovincial Migrant Labour." "History looks different from the countryside" is the tagline for Danny Samson's scholarly blog *Rural Colonial Nova Scotia*. See [danieljosephsamson.com](http://danieljosephsamson.com). See also Samson, *Contested Countryside*.

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Part 1

# Formations

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# 1 Empire, Colonial Enterprise, and Speculation

## Cape Breton's Coal Boom of the 1860s

*Don Nerbas*

During the 1860s, Cape Breton Island's Sydney coalfield experienced an industrial revolution. The Nova Scotia government negotiated an end to the monopoly held by the London-based General Mining Association (GMA) in 1858, as Cape Breton's coal trade entered a new and unprecedented phase of expansion. The Reciprocity Treaty of 1854 opened the burgeoning United States market to Nova Scotia's coal, and the American Civil War buoyed that demand during the 1860s. In 1864 a correspondent for the Halifax *Evening Express* described the transformation that resulted on the island:

When I visited the various localities along the Southern coast of Cape Breton, between Arichat and the Great Bras d'Or entrance some ten years ago, I had no idea that within the time that has since intervened so many enterprises would have sprung up. At that time Cow Bay, and Glace Bay, were inhabited only by a few persons who obtained a scanty livelihood by the hybrid occupation of farming a little and fishing less. At present there are two extensive Coal Mining Companies at Cow Bay with hundreds of men employed the whole year round.<sup>1</sup>

Historians have deemed this period in the history of Cape Breton coal as one of "cyclonic" development,<sup>2</sup> "a wholly new era of coalmining capitalism,"<sup>3</sup> and "an ultra competitive phase in the coal industry."<sup>4</sup> In so doing, they posit a dramatic shift away from imperially conferred monopoly and toward a liberal era

of competition and growing dependence upon American capital and markets, less connected to the British Empire than before. In recent years, however, Canadian historians such as Kurt Korneski and Andrew Smith have returned to consider empire and its evolution and role in shaping a distinctive form of capitalism in northern North America. This chapter builds upon this renewed engagement with empire and seeks to illuminate the distinctive imperial and transnational dimensions that have shaped Cape Breton's political economy of coal. What follows is a historical reconstruction of Cape Breton's coal boom of the 1860s, its aftermath, and the broader political economy in which it was situated.<sup>5</sup>

Engaging with the work of James Belich and John Darwin, this chapter locates the Sydney coalfield (figure 1.1) in an evolving and expanding "Angloworld" and "British world-system" and demonstrates how the Sydney coalfield was shaped by the social and economic configurations that developed in the region under the British Empire.<sup>6</sup> Established mercantile and political elites powerfully shaped Cape Breton's coal trade. They captured valuable coal lands and inserted them into international networks of exchange and investment, pursuing accumulation strategies in trade and finance that reinforced Cape Breton's colonial role as a resource hinterland. Investment in coal represented for these elites a new commodity to trade and profit from



**Figure 1.1.** The Maritimes, showing the location of the Sydney coalfield. Source: Richard Brown, *The Coal Fields and Coal Trade of the Island of Cape Breton* (1871), front matter.



in a familiar seafaring world. But coal mining involved the mobilization of credit and infrastructure expenditures that exceeded what was typically required to participate in the region's traditional staples trades. As the mineral-fueled economy emerged during the age of steam power, coal proved particularly susceptible to speculation and the exaggerated hopes of investors in Halifax and London, who supplied capital for what were increasingly becoming imprudent investments in coal.

The end of the GMA's monopoly unleashed a spate of speculation and promotion that brought into stark relief the Sydney coalfield's place in an Angloworld that confirmed the region's connections to the British Empire and an "empire effect"—sustained investment under volatile economic conditions following the abrogation of the Reciprocity Treaty in 1866.<sup>7</sup> In his analysis of the expansion of the Angloworld, Belich has argued that speculation and promotion resulted in fixed investments and engendered economic and political commitments—a "boom mentality"—that spurred growth.<sup>8</sup> While Belich tended to associate this phenomenon in the North American context with the settlement of "newland" areas in the continental interior and West, Cape Breton's coal boom of the 1860s suggests the need for a more textured framework to account for the timing of this expansionism in North America.<sup>9</sup> Located in the Gulf of St. Lawrence off the northeastern tip of mainland Nova Scotia and for centuries the site of European mercantile investment, Cape Breton was an industrial frontier powerfully shaped by established hierarchies of colonial society.<sup>10</sup>

## Imperial Origins

Relative proximity to Europe and the presence of abundant cod stocks drew Cape Breton Island into the orbit of European mercantilism, which turned its attention to the island's coal resources as early as the seventeenth century.<sup>11</sup> With the construction of Fortress Louisbourg, begun in 1720, France anchored its commercial presence in the Atlantic region on Cape Breton Island (Île Royale). Exposed coal was dug from the cliffs at Cow Bay to supply the fortress and passing ships.<sup>12</sup> But the fortress was captured by the British for a second time in 1758—a prelude to the British conquest of Canada—and subsequently reduced to rubble. Under British rule, coal production was restricted in an effort to limit prospective economic competition from North America. Established as

an independent British colony for Loyalists fleeing the American Revolution in 1784, Cape Breton was reannexed into Nova Scotia in 1820.<sup>13</sup>

Coal production on the island was expanded in the decades to come under the sanction of royal prerogative. The debts owed by the Duke of York to the jewellers Rundell, Bridges, and Rundell of London had reached very substantial sums by 1825. In order to recover what they were owed, Rundell, Bridges, and Rundell looked to a lease originally granted to the duke by his father, King George III, in 1788, which gave rights to Nova Scotia's unworked mineral resources for sixty years. After coal was added to the list of resources named in it, the duke's brother, King George IV, authorized the lease, and the duke then conveyed it to his creditors to pay down his debts and obtain much-needed income. Rundell, Bridges, and Rundell formed the GMA to work the Nova Scotia lease and pursue mining ventures in South America. By 1828 the GMA secured an agreement with the Nova Scotia government for leases on the valuable Sydney and Pictou coal properties—upon which the duke had lacked claim—until 1886. The company also used its influence to have Sydney Mines and Pictou declared free ports, thus opening those ports to direct trade with the United States. The GMA's strategy was to sell coal to the nearby urban markets of the American northeast. With this monopoly over Nova Scotia's mineral resources thus established, Cape Breton coal was put to service to pay down the debts of British royalty.<sup>14</sup>

This project depended on the export of capital, technology, and skilled labour from Britain.<sup>15</sup> English mining engineer Richard Brown oversaw operations at Sydney Mines, where a deep shaft was sunk, a railway and shipping wharf built, steam-driven equipment set up, and company houses erected for skilled colliers from northern England and South Wales. During the 1830s, the bituminous coal from Sydney Mines captured a significant market in the United States before anthracite coal came into general use. Sydney coal was sold by American coal dealers “under the name of Liverpool orrell” and was considered “a favourite fuel at the time in New York and Boston.”<sup>16</sup> However, in 1842 the US government increased the duty on imported coal to “protect the emerging coal industry in Pennsylvania.” The cost advantage of the Sydney coalfield's proximity to tidewater was reduced, and American consumers developed a preference for the cleaner burning anthracite in their homes. As a result, the use of Cape Breton coal was mostly restricted to the regional market, principally the colonial capitals of Halifax and St. John's, Newfoundland.<sup>17</sup> The GMA had not fully realized its grand ambitions by the

time the British Parliament dismantled the mercantilist system in the 1840s. After that point, the association's privileges were increasingly vulnerable to the onslaught of colonial reformers in Nova Scotia who, having won responsible government in 1848, viewed the continuation of the GMA monopoly as a hindrance to the colony's progress and development.<sup>18</sup>

By the middle years of the nineteenth century, the political power of the merchant class in Nova Scotia remained a fundamental fact of the colony's social order.<sup>19</sup> As elsewhere in British North America, colonial reformers in Nova Scotia had assailed the sinecures of the Tory establishment in Halifax during the 1830s and 1840s. But this conflict was calmed by midcentury. As David Sutherland has pointed out, the capital's merchant elite came to recognize that responsible government "allowed for the imposition of elitist restraints on . . . the excesses of popular democracy" and that "reform would not tamper with the essentials of merchantocracy." Intermarriage and the assimilation of upwardly mobile men into its ranks such as Samuel Cunard and William Stairs meant that by the middle years of the century, Halifax's merchant elite had evolved into "an interlocking cousinhood."<sup>20</sup> The presence of this merchant class was felt with the arrival of the GMA to the Sydney coalfield. The association had appointed Cunard as its business agent in 1834 in a move designed to capture colonial support for a company whose "monopoly was resented by local capitalists."<sup>21</sup> By the 1860s Cunard's sons had inherited control of the Halifax agency and exercised managerial oversight over the GMA's mines.

Cape Breton's most important nineteenth-century merchant likely was Thomas Dickson Archibald (1813–90). Born of a prominent family from Colchester County, as a young man Archibald worked in the GMA's Pictou office before moving to Sydney Mines in 1832. He became a senior partner in the mercantile firm of Archibald and Company in North Sydney, where the coal pier for the Sydney Mines was situated.<sup>22</sup> E. P. Archbold (ca. 1813–98) was a later arrival. Born in Cork County, Ireland, Archbold operated as a merchant in Halifax before relocating to Sydney, where he handled "a very large stock" of dry goods and groceries.<sup>23</sup> These men were among the most prominent merchants operating from Sydney Harbour. They arrived in Cape Breton with commercial and political connections to mainland Nova Scotia that gave them access to credit, goods, and market information. The timing of their arrival also coincided with the mass migration of Scottish Gaels from the western islands and Highlands of Scotland to Cape Breton.<sup>24</sup> Merchants such

as Archibald and Archbold constituted an English-speaking and predominantly Protestant merchant class that exercised influence over and stood apart from much of the fast-expanding rural, settler population.<sup>25</sup>

The road to prominence did not strictly require commercial success, however. John Bourinot (1814–84) was born on the Channel Island of Jersey. He migrated to Cape Breton in the 1830s, when he was in his twenties, and operated for a time as a ship chandler. In Arichat, where Jersey merchants had commanded the fishery since Cape Breton's transfer to British control in the 1760s, Bourinot married Margaret Jane Marshall, the daughter of an ex-reformer assemblyman for Sydney County, John George Marshall, who had been appointed chief justice of the Court of Common Pleas for Cape Breton in 1823. As one of his biographers has noted, Bourinot's marriage into this prominent Loyalist family "aided his rise to prominence in the colony."<sup>26</sup> In the 1840s he served as justice of the peace and as surveyor of shipping at Sydney in the 1850s before being elected in 1858 to the House of Assembly as a Conservative member for Cape Breton County. He was also appointed vice consul for the French government—as the French Atlantic fleet commonly called at Sydney for coal, mail, and other supplies.<sup>27</sup>

This colonial elite was imbricated with the British Empire and its Atlantic economy, which had oriented the Maritime region to outside trade with Britain, the American northeast, and the Caribbean. The coming age of steam offered new possibilities. E. P. Archbold, John Bourinot, T. D. Archibald, and the GMA's mine manager at Sydney Mines, Richard Brown, were among the leading citizens of the area to endorse an 1851 plan—ultimately unrealized—to make Sydney Harbour the terminus for the proposed European and North American Railway. Coal was central to this vision: steamships could maximize their cargoes by refuelling at Sydney; overseas journeys from Europe could be shortened; and the movement of mail and goods within the Atlantic economy could be accelerated with the motive power of Cape Breton coal.<sup>28</sup> For these men, the island's future lay primarily in its ability to serve as a hub within the Atlantic world and gateway to North America, coal-fueled progress that would reinforce the island's traditional Atlantic orientation.

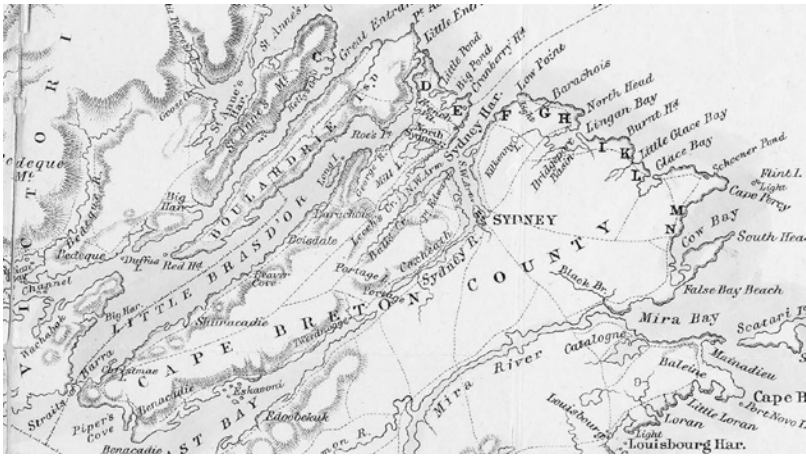
However, merchants in Cape Breton as well as Halifax lacked the state power to formulate their own trade policies within this economy. That authority ultimately resided in London, and the Reciprocity Treaty of 1854 reflected this. The British government negotiated the Reciprocity Treaty principally in response to pressure from the Canadas and to allay tensions with the United

States over the North American fisheries. Because of its dependence upon the fisheries, Nova Scotia opposed a treaty that would cede fishing rights to American vessels. But ultimately the colony's political leaders had no power to protect exclusive fishing rights and were forced to accept the treaty, with the hope that its provisions for free trade in agricultural commodities and minerals would offer some form of compensation.<sup>29</sup> The Reciprocity Treaty revealed the limited ability of Nova Scotia merchants and politicians to shape their own trade opportunities in the face of more powerful forces within the British world-system—in Britain itself, the United States, and the United Province of Canada.<sup>30</sup>

## After Monopoly

The Reciprocity Treaty nonetheless opened Cape Breton to the burgeoning urban-industrial economy of the American northeast and its demand for coal, especially gas coal. The GMA was quick to respond to the new opportunities associated with the treaty. In November 1854 the company's Sydney Mines office issued a call for tenders from carpenters and masons for the construction of twenty-four "workmen's houses" at the site of the Lingan Mines, whose coal, due to its low sulphur content, had "been found very suitable for the manufacture of gas" (figure 1.2).<sup>31</sup> By the following summer, the barque *Norfolk* arrived from Newcastle "with a valuable Cargo of Machinery, Bricks &c," a "large portion of which" was to supply the new works at Lingan. "There is much present bustle and activity at Lingan consequent upon the erection of houses, &c, there," reported the *Cape Breton News*.<sup>32</sup> In 1855 the GMA sold 5,032 tons of Lingan coal, and the government commenced weekly mail service from Sydney.<sup>33</sup>

Richard Brown's brother-in-law, Charles Barrington, served as resident manager at Lingan. And Brown's teenaged son, R. H. Brown, joined Barrington there. "Uncle Charles desired me to write you for some hay," he wrote to his father in July 1856, "as he has none for the horses, please do send some as soon as possible." His letter continued, "We have been shipping constantly since you were here, and the total shipped up to the present date amounts to 2007 Chald[ron]s of Large Coal, and 98 Chald[ron]s of Slack. There are at present in the Harbour the Brigantine 'Chimborazo' of Boston + the 'Charles' of Cornwallis[,] the former bound for Philadelphia + the latter for New York."<sup>34</sup> Manhattan's expanding population and demand for gaslight—to illuminate

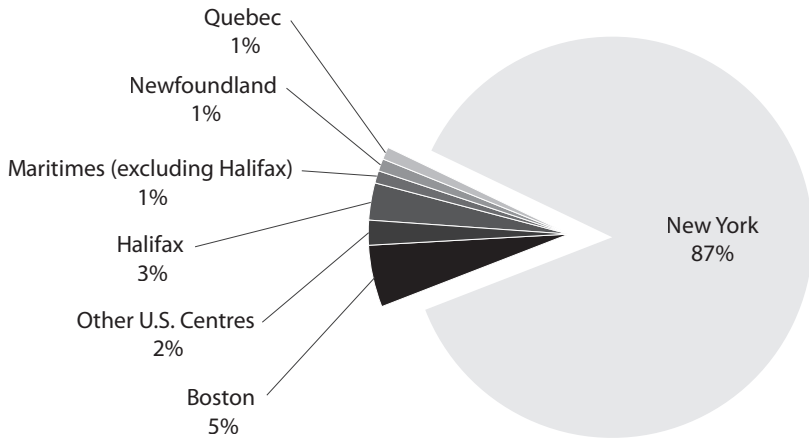


**Figure 1.2.** Cape Breton coal mines: E = Sydney Mines; H = Lingan; I = International; K = Glace Bay; L = Caledonia; M = Block House; N = Gowrie.  
 Source: Detail, *Map of the Island of Cape Breton Compiled from Recent Surveys* (1868), Edward Weller, lithographer, map 909, Beaton Institute, Cape Breton University, Sydney, Nova Scotia.

streets, factories, and homes—created an especially important market for Lingan coal. Two Manhattan gaslight companies, the Manhattan Gas Light Company and the New York Gas Light Company, consumed most of the coal mined at Lingan by the 1860s, if not earlier (see figure 1.3).<sup>35</sup>

The Reciprocity Treaty also helped create the conditions for ending the GMA's monopoly, as coal production on Cape Breton Island underwent an unprecedented expansion, reaching an annual output of 127,000 tons by 1857 (see figure 1.4). On coal policy, Liberals and Conservatives broadly coalesced around a growth agenda based on the expectation of increased returns to be generated by the trade's growth. The GMA's economic position, in the end, was not directly challenged when the termination of its monopoly was finally negotiated in 1858: the GMA retained its operating mines, secured claims to coal properties it wanted for future development, and won a favourable royalty schedule. This resolution was perhaps unremarkable given that a former GMA solicitor, J. W. Johnston, headed the Nova Scotia government when the negotiations were completed.<sup>36</sup>

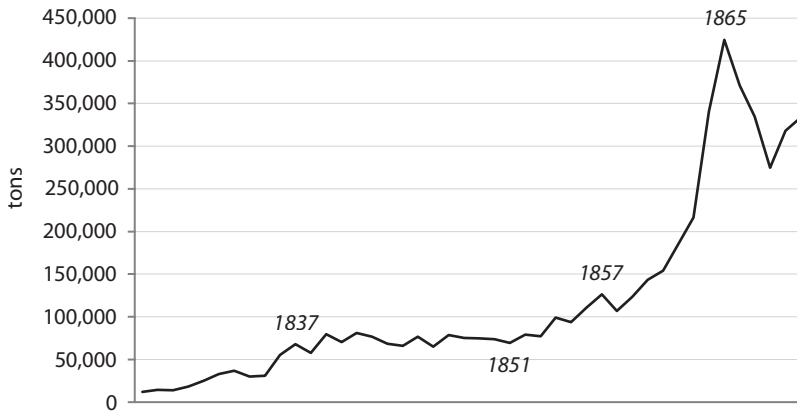
After the termination of the GMA monopoly, men of the colonial merchant-political class such as Bourinot, Archibald, and Archbold assumed



**Figure 1.3.** Destination of coal shipped from the Lingan Mines, July 1860 to September 1863. *Source:* Data from “Lingan Mines Coal Sales, 1860–1863” (ledger), 20 D5 (c), MG 14, General Mining Association (GMA) Fonds, Beaton Institute, Cape Breton University, Sydney, Nova Scotia.

new leadership roles in the development and promotion of the coal trade. They transformed coal resources into capital investments. Meanwhile, the diminishing availability of farmland on the island was creating an abundance of labour available for coal mining, as members of “backland” farming households fully entered the capitalist labour market or sought temporary wage work to supplement farm incomes.<sup>37</sup>

Following the termination of the GMA monopoly, John Bourinot’s son, Marshall, was the first individual to acquire a coal lease in Cape Breton, encompassing the site near “the old French workings” from the Louisbourg era at Cow Bay.<sup>38</sup> John Young of Lingan also had his eye on the site and applied for the lease on 5 June 1858. Though Young’s application was made eight days before Bourinot’s, Bourinot was ultimately awarded the lease on 10 January 1859. Young petitioned the government for redress. The Committee on Crown Property found in the summer of 1860 that Young had indeed been mistreated through “inadvertence” by the department, but it expressed reluctance to interfere on his behalf, since Bourinot had “incurred considerable expense in the working of the mine.”<sup>39</sup> The committee had, four years earlier, ruled against another petition from Young: his application in 1854 for a grant of land at Lingan, which he alleged had been in his possession for twenty years



**Figure 1.4.** Cape Breton coal sales, 1827–70. *Source:* Data from Richard Brown, *The Coal Fields and Coal Trade of the Island of Cape Breton* (1871), 98 (table 3) and 161 (table 5).

and on which he had built a wharf and “other improvements,” had been denied in favour of the GMA. The committee refused to overturn this decision.<sup>40</sup>

Marshall Bourinot was only around nineteen years of age when he acquired the lease for the Block House Mines. Given his youth and the apparent favouritism his lease application received, he most certainly depended on his father’s political connections. “Son of John Bourinot is not of age,” reported the local correspondent for the R. G. Dun credit reporting agency in September 1858.<sup>41</sup> John Bourinot offered his son political connections but not capital: “Not good at all[,] heavily in debt,” reported the Dun correspondent of John Bourinot, “French Consul. no other means of living.”<sup>42</sup> But large sums were not required to acquire coal property at this early stage. A \$20 search licence, a bond with “sufficient sureties” to compensate for any damages made to private property during the search, and a \$50 license to work the mine: these were all the expenses required to obtain coal property.<sup>43</sup> This system ensured that personal and political connections—social and political capital—determined access to Crown resources. Men such as John Young, described by the Dun correspondent as “poor . . . and without education or knowledge of bus[iness],” faced considerable disadvantages.<sup>44</sup> And, indeed, the manner of handling mining applications in Cape Breton heightened the potential for local manipulation. On the island, the local officer of the Crown Land Department was allowed to receive mining applications, and those applications were given priority



over those submitted directly to the department in Halifax. This practice, according to a House committee in 1864, produced “uncertainty and confusion, besides being liable to abuse.”<sup>45</sup> Sydney merchant E. P. Archbold had also acquired a coal lease by 1859, “commencing operations at what was then known as the Burnt mines” at Little Glace Bay.<sup>46</sup> As with the Bourinot case, the lease would later be contested by nonelite men, who alleged that Archbold had exercised influence over the deputy commissioner’s local surveyor.<sup>47</sup> The House of Assembly, likewise, decided not to interfere with the capital investment already made on Archbold’s leasehold, despite evidence that mistakes had been made.<sup>48</sup>

## Expansion

Given the capital requirements associated with opening and operating the mines, new partnerships were required to actually develop them. Only a few months after he applied for the Cow Bay lease in 1858, Marshall Bourinot was said to be “supported by John Esson of Halifax,” a wealthy merchant.<sup>49</sup> The inspector of mines reported at the end of 1859 that the colliery “opened a few months ago”: a shaft of forty feet had been sunk, a steam engine imported, and a considerable quantity of coal banked for shipment in the spring.<sup>50</sup> This development coincided with Bourinot’s acquisition of credit in the United States from Robert Belloni, a New York coal dealer who was recasting his business activities after the failure of a Pennsylvania coal company with which he had been associated.<sup>51</sup> Belloni soon entered into a business partnership with Bourinot under the name Bourinot and Company to operate the Block House Mines, which in 1861 shipped six thousand tons of coal “to New York in American vessels.”<sup>52</sup> After another pit was opened and new expenditures made on railways, rolling stock, a workshop, a forge, and dwelling houses for workers, Belloni bought out Bourinot’s share in the Block House Mines for \$30,000.<sup>53</sup> Supported by an influential backer, Daniel Phoenix Ingraham, a New York Supreme Court justice, Belloni succeeded in capturing the business of the Manhattan Gas Light Company and generating “a good prof[it]” from coal sales.<sup>54</sup>

With the demand for coal rising during the American Civil War, the Block House Mines was a property that could attract investment and upon which Robert Belloni could secure credit. Belloni’s purchase of the Block House Mines was, for instance, executed with a cash payment of only \$500. The rest

was to be paid in two \$2,000 installments of negotiable paper, followed by yearly installments of \$5,000.<sup>55</sup> These notes were accepted by the Bourinots and conveyed to the Bank of Nova Scotia.<sup>56</sup> In June 1864 Belloni formed a new company, the Block House Mining Company, with a reported capital of \$1 million. He also moved from New York City to Cow Bay to manage the mines.<sup>57</sup> The number of men and boys who worked at Block House grew to 557; “no less than 60 buildings, comprising Superintendent’s dwelling, engine house, warehouses, shops, and miners’ houses” were erected; and the output of coal more than quadrupled from the previous year, exceeding seventy thousand tons.<sup>58</sup> The firm appeared to occupy a strong position, supplying “the Manhattan Gas Co with the principal coal they use for NYork City.”<sup>59</sup> But despite its success in linking Cape Breton coal to New York’s gaslight industry, much of the company’s working capital would appear to come from Halifax and in particular from men associated with the Bank of Nova Scotia.

Just south of the Block House Mines, also at Cow Bay, the Gowrie Mines had been a thriving enterprise since opening in 1862. T. D. Archibald was the most influential merchant and shipowner operating from Sydney Harbour as well as a member of the colony’s Legislative Council since 1854. In partnership with cousin Blowers Archibald in the firm Archibald and Company, T. D. Archibald oversaw a shipyard at North Sydney and operated fishing stations on the island.<sup>60</sup> As a member of Nova Scotia’s upper house, Archibald had taken “a great interest in the arrangements made in 1857–58 to terminate the monopoly of the General Mining Association.”<sup>61</sup> His ability to acquire a well-known coal property, the site of “an old French pit,” was undoubtedly due to his power and prominence.<sup>62</sup> In the first year of the Gowrie Mines’ operation, Archibald and Company spent \$28,800 on infrastructure, including a wharf, a railroad and rolling stock, and housing.<sup>63</sup> The firm also commenced construction of a breakwater to protect its wharf and ships loading coal.<sup>64</sup> In 1863, the breakwater was completed, an additional \$63,260 was spent on infrastructure, and more than fifteen thousand tons of coal were raised and shipped from the mine. During the course of the year, an average of 120 men and 20 boys were employed. “The coal from the mine bears a good character in the market,” reported the mine inspector’s report, “being considered valuable for gas, steam, and manufacturing purposes.”<sup>65</sup> Another \$33,450 was invested the following year, and output nearly doubled.<sup>66</sup> Commanding a large shipping fleet and apparently drawing mostly upon his own capital, T. D. Archibald attained a self-sufficiency and business autonomy in the coal trade unmatched

by the other large operators. A bustling mining village had emerged at Cow Bay within only a few years.

At Little Glace Bay, Sydney merchant E. P. Archbold had “laid out a good deal,” not long after the GMA monopoly ended, but the “nature of the Shipping place” was not promising.<sup>67</sup> And like Marshall Bourinot, Archbold relied on a Halifax partner, James A. Moren, a major shipowner.<sup>68</sup> The report on coal mines issued by the commissioner of Crown lands and inspector of mines in February 1862 suggested that Archbold’s operations were crude and underdeveloped: the coal seam was not fully worked—“causing a waste of two or three feet of the best portion of the vein, left on the floor”—and drainage and ventilation were “imperfect.”<sup>69</sup> In January the local R. G. Dun correspondent reported that Archbold had recently partnered with a group from Massachusetts, composed of Joseph Converse, James W. Emery, Estes Howe, Gardiner C. Hubbard, and W. B. Parrott. They paid him \$75,000 for a half share in the mine, and the Glace Bay Mining Company was formed to contain this new partnership.<sup>70</sup> Halifax men, including J. R. Lithgow, were also interested in the new company.<sup>71</sup> This capital transformed the works. The largest expenditure in 1862—\$32,500—went toward the construction of a new harbour. “The value of this deposite of coal depends entirely upon having a suitable place for vessels to lay and load the coal,” wrote Archbold.<sup>72</sup> By the spring of 1863, the improvements to the Little Glace Bay Harbour had been completed.<sup>73</sup> R. J. Uniacke captured the renovated state of the harbour in 1864:

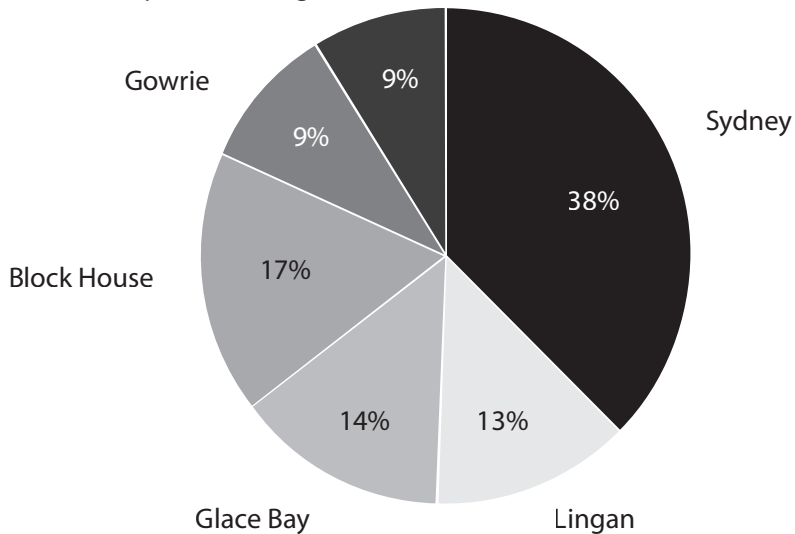
About three years previous to my visit . . . I crossed over a small marshy brook, running into a silent bay, upon a pole bridge about a hundred yards long. . . . But now I found this little brook widened to a great extent. Twelve or thirteen large vessels, Barques, brigs and schooners occupied its basin as a secure dock or harbour, whilst they received their freight of superior coal, by a succession of cars, rolling along from the neighbouring pit.<sup>74</sup>

Coal sales from the mines had tripled in 1863 and tripled again in 1864, reaching 72,077 tons.<sup>75</sup> The company had by 1864 erected 48 buildings on the site, including “29 dwelling houses, comprising 65 tenements,” as well as “stores, offices, shops, engine houses,” and a schoolhouse.<sup>76</sup> With these investments made, Archbold sought to monopolize the trade of this burgeoning mining town.<sup>77</sup>

The Glace Bay Mining Company at Little Glace Bay and the Block House and Gowrie Mines at Cow Bay accounted for 40 percent of all of Cape Breton's coal sales from 1860 to 1869. The GMA's Lingan Mines made up 13 percent of all sales during the same period. And Sydney Mines remained not only the GMA's largest producer but also the island's largest producer, responsible for 37 percent of Cape Breton's coal sales. These four operators, then, were responsible for 90 percent of Cape Breton's coal sales (figure 1.5). Though many more small operators established mines during the decade, the colonial social structure decisively shaped the Sydney coalfield's transition to competitive capitalism, concentrating the area's productive coal properties in the hands of a few prominent men.

And they enjoyed large profits too. Even with heavy investment, wrote C. Ochiltree MacDonald in 1909, the Glace Bay Mining Company "declared dividends of 25 percent. on capital, doubled that capital and paid 15 percent, added again one-half making a \$600,000 stock list and then paid 12½ percent."<sup>78</sup> The Block House Mines generated \$60,000 in profit in 1860 and cleared over \$200,000 during a two-year period straddling the end of the

Others (17 separate mining areas)



**Figure 1.5.** Total percentage of Cape Breton coal sales, 1860–69. *Source:* Data from Richard Brown, *The Coal Fields and Coal Trade of the Island of Cape Breton* (1871), 161 (table 5).

Reciprocity Treaty.<sup>79</sup> As for the GMA, having drawn on the police power of the state to defeat a strike at Sydney Mines in 1864, it paid out dividends totalling 35 percent to its shareholders in 1866.<sup>80</sup> This economic bounty was accompanied by a wider investment frenzy, as Cape Breton coal was in high demand for the production of manufactured gas that illuminated the streets of Manhattan and briefly reached new urban markets such as Washington, DC, and Baltimore.

Positioned within a remarkably transnational political economy oriented toward Atlantic trade, this was indeed an economic “golden age” in the Maritime region before Confederation with Canada.

## Crisis

But this political economy was soon thrown into crisis. The end of the American Civil War led to the abrogation of the Reciprocity Treaty and the imposition of a \$1.25 per ton duty on coal entering the United States, a consequence of the rising influence of industrial capital within the United States as well as American resentment toward Britain’s somewhat sympathetic attitude toward the southern Confederacy.<sup>81</sup> This change in commercial policy spelled a dramatic worsening of market prospects for Cape Breton coal operators, since by 1866 most of their output was destined for the American market.

But coal mining required a large investment of immovable capital—the sinking of mine shafts and the construction of railways, buildings, and wharves—and once invested, this capital could not be put to another purpose.<sup>82</sup> As a result, operators could not easily exit the market, as profits turned into losses. Charles J. Campbell followed a trajectory not unfamiliar among prominent Cape Breton merchants in the nineteenth century. Born in the Isle of Skye, he had arrived in Baddeck from Halifax in 1840 as a merchant’s clerk. By 1859 he was a merchant shipbuilder, a member of the House of Assembly and owner of one-fifth of Baddeck’s assessable property.<sup>83</sup> His foray into coal mining in the early 1860s appeared promising and absorbed the “greater part of his cap[ital],” but once the boom ended, he appears to have been saddled with a mine from which he could not extract his capital.<sup>84</sup> Meanwhile, the Massachusetts businessmen in the Glace Bay Mining Company withdrew from the enterprise in 1865, opened the nearby Caledonia Colliery, and by the early 1870s were reporting a paid-in capital of \$600,000.<sup>85</sup> And a group of New York capitalists had formed the International Coal Company in 1864 and

subsequently invested considerable sums, including in the construction of a thirteen-mile railway to connect their mine at Bridgeport with Sydney Harbour.<sup>86</sup> These new capital investments in mining infrastructure could not be reversed or put to another use as the prospects of the coal trade deteriorated.

The resultant competitive pressures were made worse by the scarcity of vessels available to transport coal. American sail tonnage during the Civil War had been restricted to North Atlantic trading “through fear of capture by Confederate cruisers further to the south.”<sup>87</sup> The war’s conclusion put an end to this abundance of ships.<sup>88</sup> R. H. Brown wrote to his father, Richard Brown, whom he had succeeded as the GMA manager at Sydney Mines in 1864, about the ensuing difficulties. When the market for coal improved in 1871–73, R. H. Brown often had to “bank out” coal for lack of ships to transport it to market.<sup>89</sup> This want of vessels also made it difficult to predict shipping costs. To obtain scarce business, the Glace Bay Mining Company and other operators secured considerable American purchases in 1870 by agreeing to deliver coal at a fixed price, which meant they assumed the risk of delivery. This made it easier for agents to make contracts with consumers, but it could also result in significant losses to operators.<sup>90</sup>

These limitations were made apparent as the Block House Mines and other operators sold coal at a loss to retain and win customers.<sup>91</sup> This pressure forced the GMA to discount its coal, and the company’s board also championed the implementation of cost-saving measures at the mines.<sup>92</sup> But the continued dependence of the GMA’s mines at Pictou and Lingan upon the American market damaged the company’s overall profitability. Dividend payments were suspended, and by the end of 1869, £20 GMA shares were being quoted at only £8 on the London stock exchange.<sup>93</sup> Richard Brown, who sat on the GMA’s board in London, had advised his son to purchase shares in 1866 but three years later despaired of that advice. He wrote his son at Sydney Mines, “The purchase of the G.M.A. shares was an unfortunate speculation for which I blame myself but they were paying so well that I thought you could not do better.”<sup>94</sup>

Although the GMA faced intense competition, it commanded choice locations on the Sydney coalfield and mainland Nova Scotia and had developed a sound capital stock. Its new competitors, on the other hand, generally occupied less valuable coal properties and financed their expansion on borrowed money. Their position was worse. Robert Belloni along with his brother, Louis J. Belloni, and nephew, Louis J. Belloni Jr., relied upon Halifax creditors to

sustain the Block House Mines. Though the Dun correspondent in New York reported in 1870 that “the trade generally lack confidence in the family of this name,” the Bellonis managed to sell stock in “Provincial Markets,” especially in Halifax, and bonds to the Bank of Nova Scotia. They also borrowed money from Bank of Nova Scotia director William Hare and commission merchant J. C. Allison. The Bellonis’ unscrupulous business methods, together with the company’s inability to sell coal in the American market at a profit, led to the temporary closure of the Block House Mines in 1871 and serious legal wrangling with their Halifax investors. J. C. Allison held personal debts of the Bellonis amounting to \$50,000 and was verging on bankruptcy by 1871. And William Hare, who had countersigned \$47,000 in Belloni notes, was forced to declare bankruptcy that year. The directors were by this time “quarrelling among themselves.” By the summer of 1873, the old company was defunct, and a new edition of the Block House Mining Company was organized by the beginning of 1874. Robert Belloni took \$100,000 in stock, which he was likely holding for Judge Ingraham and his nephew, Louis J. Belloni Jr. The Dun correspondent concluded that the reorganized “company appear[s] to have got 100m\$ from Nova Scotia people’s money, which is probably its active capital.” The Bellonis “made money out of negotiating the stock” and used this fresh capital to invest in mills in Paterson, New Jersey. Within a few months, the Halifax shareholders offered to sell their shares to Robert Belloni for a refund of their money. They wanted out. But Belloni—who probably lacked the money—refused the offer.<sup>95</sup>

Money could thus be made from the promotion of failing enterprises. And, indeed, speculative capital and promotion took command. After selling his share in the Block House Mines to Robert Belloni, Marshall Bourinot aggressively speculated in prospective coal properties. At the height of the boom, in 1865, Bourinot wrote to the president of the Bank of Nova Scotia in Halifax, M. B. Almon, to borrow against his landed investments: “By holding this property a few months longer I will get a much larger sum.”<sup>96</sup> Having apparently “spent all his money” on prospective coal properties, the death of the New York investor interested in his holdings and the abrogation of the Reciprocity Treaty ruined Bourinot’s business prospects.<sup>97</sup> Meanwhile, the New York promoters of a mine at Cow Bay claimed a fully paid-up capital of \$500,000, with the majority of shares reportedly held in Nova Scotia. The president of this enterprise, Edward S. Sherman, was described by the Dun

correspondent as “shrewd” and “a trifle too sharp.” His coal company, in fact, appeared a fraud.<sup>98</sup>

The case of the Glasgow and Cape Breton Coal and Railway Company and its interrelated companies was even more spectacular, hinting at the capacity of the “empire effect” to channel London capital into the colonies. It was part of an ambitious initiative led by Frederick Newton Gisborne (1824–92). An English engineer, he had been responsible for laying the first submarine telegraph line in North America and was the originator of the idea of a transatlantic cable, activities in the 1850s that brought him into association with New York paper manufacturer Cyrus W. Field and the British consul in New York, Edward Mortimer Archibald, T. D. Archibald’s nephew. In 1865 he became the Nova Scotia government’s London agent of mines and minerals. A visit to Nova Scotia in 1869 would convince him of the potential of the Sydney coalfield. In earnest, he gathered English capitalists to invest in Cape Breton coal.<sup>99</sup> “I had, until 1871,” later commented Gisborne, “been new to coal mining and therefore had commenced work . . . under the advice from the Government Inspector of Mines.”<sup>100</sup> Nova Scotia coal promoters had indeed been actively encouraging British investment in Cape Breton mining areas, which was deemed superior to the “skeleton capital” of American speculators.<sup>101</sup> And a number of entrepreneurs from Cape Breton, including Robert Belloni, sought to attract capital from the city of London.<sup>102</sup>

Through these imperial public-private channels and working with Thomas P. Baker, chief inspector of machinery at the Chatham Dockyard, Gisborne connected the Sydney coalfield directly to capital from the city of London. In 1871, he convinced the London stockbroker Thomas Fenn to lend him the money required to secure coal properties bonded to him. As a consequence of this evolving business relationship, soon Fenn and another London stockbroker, E. F. Satterthwaite, were the largest shareholders of a company operating on the Sydney coalfield, the Lorway Coal Company.<sup>103</sup> Gisborne worked with Baker and Fenn through the Coal Area Association, whose offices were opened in London in March 1871, to promote their interrelated ventures on the Sydney coalfield.<sup>104</sup>

These included a mine at Schooner Pond located at the terminus of the prospective Glasgow and Cape Breton Coal and Railway Company line. Gisborne had purchased the Schooner Pond property for \$40,000 from a Nova Scotia foundry owner, reported to have “been speculating with others in Coal + Gold mining.”<sup>105</sup> Gisborne thereafter sold the mine to the Schooner



Pond Coal Company, which was a part of the Coal Area Association, and negotiated a right to a quarter of its profits (after the payment of a 15 percent dividend to shareholders). The Schooner Pond and Glasgow and Cape Breton companies apparently had the same board of directors, which included Baker and Satterthwaite, and formed part of Gisborne's broader vision.<sup>106</sup>

This vision was for a railway that would run through various coal areas and connect them to shipping facilities at Sydney and Louisbourg, whose ice-free harbour would serve to ship coal during the winter months. In order to raise capital for the scheme, Fenn was paid a lump sum of £500 "as commission for placing the Glasgow and Cape Breton prospectus before his clients" as well as "2s. per share for 2,990 afterwards taken through him."<sup>107</sup> The company also received coal lands from the Nova Scotia government to subsidize the construction of its railway and commenced the development of mining operations in the inland reserve area.<sup>108</sup> An advertisement in the London *Times*, meanwhile, promised profits of 25 percent on Schooner Pond Coal Company shares once its operations were in full swing.<sup>109</sup>

The temporary resurgence in the island's coal trade in the early 1870s—and perhaps also concerns within Britain about rising coal prices and the exhaustion of domestic supplies—provided Gisborne with momentum.<sup>110</sup> The London chairman of the Glasgow and Cape Breton Coal and Railway Company, expecting the removal of the American duty on coal, advanced plans to build a railway to Louisbourg.<sup>111</sup> Yet Gisborne's financial position was poor, and the move to make the Coal Area Association a limited liability company in January 1872 suggested that he recognized the mounting risk.<sup>112</sup> By the spring the Glasgow and Cape Breton Coal and Railway Company was already running out of money.<sup>113</sup> And though lowered, the American duty on coal was not removed. By August the Glasgow and Cape Breton Coal and Railway Company, with its capital spent, was forced to borrow.<sup>114</sup>

That autumn, however, the railway from Schooner Pond to Sydney was completed. Thomas Fenn presented to the London *Times* a bright picture in March 1873; the Glasgow and Cape Breton, Lorway, and Schooner Pond companies were operating a total of five collieries on the railway line, which traversed an area where "there is not a foot of ground where a pit might not be sunk on a workable seam of coal." Fenn praised the "high reputation" of the coal, suggesting that "with English coal at its present price," a larger export trade might be developed.<sup>115</sup> The following week, a letter from an unnamed correspondent in Sydney was quoted in the London *Times*:

Almost every coal area in the island is being taken up. You are aware that the duty has been reduced to half a dollar (by the United States Government . . .), and that this year it will be done away with entirely. Coal property is, therefore, rising amazingly in value, and the remarkable circumstance is that now all our companies are English! We send coal not only to the States, West Indies, Brazil, Canada, and other Colonies, but also to Great Britain and the East Indies, at remunerating prices. There is an extraordinary demand everywhere for Cape Breton coal. Several Englishmen are resident in Sydney, and I wish with all my heart that more would come along. Scotchmen, with their energy and skill, would make fortunes fast.<sup>116</sup>

Presenting the Sydney coalfield as an emerging mecca of successful imperial investment, this account exceeded even Fenn's bombast.

In the fall of 1873, the three companies—Glasgow and Cape Breton, Lorway, and Schooner Pond—agreed to amalgamate into the Cape Breton Company.<sup>117</sup> Though more capital was sought through this new promotion, the company was in liquidation by 1875. Richard Brown, who had decades of experience in Cape Breton, had viewed Gisborne's efforts critically from the outset, concluding in July 1871 that "there was not much coal of any value" in the areas he held.<sup>118</sup> "The Shares of [Gisborne's] Company £5 paid are selling for £7," noted Brown in September 1871. "Somebody will lose money by them[,] that's certain."<sup>119</sup> And lose they did. Some investors sought to recoup their losses through the courts, claiming that Fenn and others had bilked them of their money.<sup>120</sup> But nonetheless, as Satterthwaite's attorney noted in court, "£400,000 in actual money had been spent on the machinery and works to develop the properties of the companies."<sup>121</sup> Brown, who recognized that Gisborne's Glasgow and Cape Breton had indeed been "puffed up in the London papers," marvelled at "how easy it is to gull the English capitalists!"<sup>122</sup>

Large-scale investment together with coal's association with steam technology created considerable scope for promotion and speculation, sustained by a "boom mentality" that captured imperial investment.<sup>123</sup> But although a spike in international coal prices had briefly improved the prospects and profitability of Cape Breton coal in 1871–73, by 1875 the trade was in crisis.<sup>124</sup> The collapse of the coal trade not only ruined investments but also contributed to a broader social crisis in the newly created mining villages.<sup>125</sup>

## Conclusion

Investment in coal was often a destructive engine of development. It created a whole new built environment in Cape Breton but one that proved increasingly unprofitable during the 1870s and ultimately ruinous for many. The conditions in the international Atlantic economy that provided the basis for the coal boom of the 1860s were fleeting. During the 1870s, US railway and coal companies were colluding to control the markets of the eastern United States, offering rebates on freights from the Pennsylvania coalfields.<sup>126</sup> Reliant upon the transportation regime of “wood, wind, and water” to access their major markets and operating as individual firms, Cape Breton coal operators could not match competitors who behaved as vertically integrated units within an increasingly protected national economy. Ultimately, the productive capacities built up on the Sydney coalfield in the 1860s and 1870s would be reconstituted and redirected in the 1880s by new companies operating under Canada’s National Policy, which offered some tariff protection to domestic coal operators and enabled Cape Breton producers to capture the St. Lawrence market, particularly Montreal.<sup>127</sup> This reorientation was an aspect of “Canada’s transformation into a separate northern economy with a tariff wall to guard its railways, trade, finance and infant industry.” The development of this national economy, with Montreal as its “natural” metropolis, signalled, as John Darwin has observed, an evolution in the British world-system and was deeply interconnected with the emergence of a “Britannic nationalism” in Canada.<sup>128</sup> Though Nova Scotia politicians—with fond memories of the reciprocity era—cheered on Henry Melville Whitney’s ambitions to re-establish Cape Breton coal in American markets under the Dominion Coal Company in the 1890s, the future of Cape Breton coal rested on its deeper integration into the east-west axis of a Canadian political economy, symptomatic of what Sven Beckert has recently described as the “territorialization of industrial capitalism” after 1870.<sup>129</sup>

Coal was a particular type of commodity, especially prone to financial speculation during the age of steam power. Its production was costlier than traditional forms of staples production that had dominated the regional economy, such as timber and fish production, and required a greater proportion of fixed *and* immovable capital. The result was heightened reliance on finance and considerable scope for speculation and promotion.<sup>130</sup> This study speaks to an aspect of the history of coal and empire that has been understated in such influential studies as those by Kenneth Pomeranz and E. A. Wrigley that

address coal's place in the global history of capitalism.<sup>131</sup> Although these studies offer compelling accounts of coal as a dynamic source of energy that sustained the Industrial Revolution and facilitated the rise of Britain, a somewhat different story of capitalist modernity is visible in Cape Breton. Even though the ongoing transition to an energy-intensive mineral-based economy was a transformation that underlay the boom of the 1860s, the political economy of coal on Cape Breton Island was far from being governed by the demand for energy alone. Rather, it was shaped by Cape Breton's place within the British world-system as a resource hinterland on the margins of empire and emerging industrial nation-states during the age of steam power. Combining elements that Belich has attributed to "oldlands" and "newlands" of the North American Angloworld, Cape Breton's coal boom of the 1860s reveals the advance of an investment and industrial frontier, promoted by colonial elites and realized in nodes of cyclonic, and often ruinous, expansion. Mediated by colonial institutions, networks, and business practices, this episode of colonial boosterism set in motion a sequence of developments that would culminate in the making of what was purportedly Canada's largest industrial corporation, the British Empire Steel Corporation, a half century later, which delivered to the Sydney coalfield another round of financial ruination.<sup>132</sup>

## Notes

This chapter first appeared in the *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 46, no. 6 (2018). It is reprinted here in a slightly revised form with permission of the publisher Taylor & Francis Ltd.

1. *Cape Breton News*, 5 March 1864.
2. Hornsby, *Nineteenth-Century Cape Breton*, 169.
3. Samson, *Spirit of Industry and Improvement*, 284.
4. McKay, "Crisis of Dependent Development," 23.
5. Korneski, *Race, Nation, and Reform Ideology*; Smith, *British Businessmen and Canadian Confederation*.
6. See Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*; Darwin, *Empire Project*.
7. London's apparent preference for colonial investment is examined in Smith, "Patriotism, Self-Interest," 59–80. For the classic work on the role of finance in British imperial endeavour, see Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism*.

8. Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, 200–206. A powerful case for the importance of fixed investment in transportation infrastructure in shaping coal production is made in Jones, *Routes of Power*, 23–87.
9. Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, 177–206.
10. David Frank has demonstrated that coal production on Cape Breton Island developed as an industrial frontier within the Canadian Atlantic region. See Frank, *J. B. McLachlan*, 43–86.
11. Brown, *Coal Fields and Coal Trade*, 45.
12. Clark, *Acadia*, 328–29.
13. Morgan, “Orphan Outpost,” 8 and 12.
14. Brown, *Coal Fields*, 76–77; Gerriets, “Impact of the General Mining Association,” 61–62. See also Muise, “G.M.A. and Nova Scotia’s Coal,” 70–87; Gerriets, “Rise and Fall of a Free-Standing Company,” 16–48; Samson, “Industrial Colonization,” 3–28.
15. See Samson, “Industrial Colonization.”
16. Brown, *Coal Fields*, 80–81.
17. Hornsby, *Nineteenth-Century Cape Breton*, 96.
18. See Samson, *Spirit of Industry*, 284–310.
19. The construction of merchant power in law is examined in Muir, *Law, Debt, and Merchant Power*.
20. Sutherland, “Merchants of Halifax,” 460 and 463.
21. Blakeley, “Sir Samuel Cunard,” [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/cunard\\_samuel\\_9E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/cunard_samuel_9E.html).
22. Fergusson, “Thomas Dickson Archibald,” [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/archibald\\_thomas\\_dickson\\_11E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/archibald_thomas_dickson_11E.html).
23. Nova Scotia, vol. 12, 622 (Edward P. Archbold, 4 September 1858), R. G. Dun & Co. Credit Report Volumes, Baker Library, Harvard Business School (hereafter Dun & Co., BL).
24. Hornsby, *Nineteenth-Century Cape Breton*, 45; Harris, *Reluctant Land*, 203–5.
25. This dynamic is revealed in Morgan, “Poverty, Wretchedness, and Misery,” 88–104.
26. MacKenzie, “John Bourinot,” [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/bourinot\\_john\\_11E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/bourinot_john_11E.html).
27. Tennyson, “Economic Nationalism and Confederation,” 44.
28. *European and North American Railway Terminus, Sydney, Cape Breton, the Nearest Port in British North America to Europe* (Sydney: Cape Breton News, 1851).
29. Masters, *Reciprocity Treaty of 1854*, 12–14 and 53–54.

30. See Darwin, *Empire Project*; for a discussion of Britain's structural power in the Canadian context, see Cain and Hopkins, "Afterword," 207–10.
31. *Cape Breton News*, 9 December 1854; Brown, *Coal Fields*, 87–88.
32. *Cape Breton News*, 4 August 1855.
33. Brown, *Coal Fields*, 98; *Journal and Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Session 1854–5* (Halifax, 1855; hereafter *JHA*), appendix 92, 443; *JHA* (1856), appendix 7, 89.
34. Richard H. Brown, Lingan Mines, to "Papa," 8 July 1856, vol. 19, MG 14, General Mining Association Fonds, Beaton Institute (hereafter BI), Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS.
35. "Lingan Mines Coal Sales, 1860–1863" (ledger), 20 D5 (c), MG 14, General Mining Association Fonds, Beaton Institute, Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS.
36. Samson, *Spirit of Industry*, 305–6; Muise, "G.M.A. and Nova Scotia's Coal," 78.
37. Bitterman, "Hierarchy of the Soil," 51–52; Bitterman, "Farm Households and Wage Labour," 35–36; Samson, *Spirit of Industry*, 187–224; Muise, "Making of an Industrial Community," 76–94.
38. James McKeagney, inspector of mines, 31 December 1859, *JHA* (1860), appendix "Coal Mines," 284.
39. *Cape Breton News*, 4 August 1860.
40. *JHA* (1856), appendix 65, 237.
41. Nova Scotia, vol. 12, 621 (Marshall Bourinot, 4 September 1858), 621, Dun & Co., BL.
42. Nova Scotia, vol. 12, 618 (John Bourinot, 4 September 1858 and 28 November 1860), Dun & Co., BL. See Buggey, "John Esson," [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/esson\\_john\\_9E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/esson_john_9E.html).
43. *Regulations for Leasing of Mines Established by His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor in Council*, appendix 15, *JHA* (1863), 5–6.
44. Nova Scotia, vol. 12, 487 (John Young, 2 December 1858), Dun & Co., BL.
45. "C. J. Campbell's Petition," *JHA* (1864), appendix 48, 2.
46. *History of Nova Scotia: Biographical Sketches of Representative Citizens and Genealogical Records of the Old Families*, vol. 3 (Halifax: A. W. Bowen, 1916), 185.
47. Petition, N. L. Mackay on behalf of Hector McNeil, James McNeil, and Donald McDonald, Glace Bay, 28 April 1862, vol. 61, series C, RG 20, Nova Scotia Commissioner of Crown Lands Fonds, Nova Scotia Archives (NSA).
48. *Debates and Proceedings of the House of Assembly*, Nova Scotia (1864), evening session, 31 March, 212–13.
49. Nova Scotia, vol. 12, 621 (Marshall Bourinot, 4 September 1858), Dun & Co., BL.

50. James McKeagney, inspector of mines, 31 December 1859, *JHA* (1860), appendix "Coal Mines," 284–85.
51. Nova Scotia, vol. 12, 621 (Marshall Bourinot, 24 January 1860), Dun & Co., BL; *JHA* (1864), appendix 18, 16; New York, vol. 18, 254 (Belloni, Farrar, & Co., 11 February 1857, 27 June 1857, 23 August 1859, and 18 April 1860), Dun & Co., BL.
52. Letter to the editor by "Morien," Cow Bay, 19 February 1862, *Cape Breton News*, 22 February 1862.
53. *JHA* (1863), appendix 15, 12–13; Nova Scotia, vol. 12, 621 (Marshall Bourinot, 13 March 1863 and 23 February 1864), and New York, vol. 376, 397 (Robert Belloni & Co., 23 April 1863), Dun & Co., BL; notice, "Dissolution of Copartnership," Halifax, 22 April 1863, *Cape Breton News*, 2 May 1863.
54. New York, vol. 376, 397 (Robert Belloni, 25 March 1861 and 28 May 1863), Dun & Co., BL.
55. John Bourinot to M. B. Almon, 26 May 1863 and 25 April 1863, vol. 69, MG 1, M. B. Almon Fonds, NSA.
56. Marshall Bourinot to M. B. Almon, 23 June 1863, 6 August 1863, 18 August 1863, Almon Fonds, NSA.
57. New York, vol. 372, 943 (Block House Mining Co., 27 December 1867), 943, and vol. 376, 397 (Robert Belloni & Co., 26 June 1864), R. G. Dun & Co., BL.
58. *JHA* (1865), appendix 6, 7–8; Brown, *Coal Fields*, 161, table 5.
59. New York, vol. 372, 943 (Block House Mining Co., 14 August 1868), Dun & Co., BL.
60. Archibald & Co. ledgers (1824–46), MG 14, 45, Archibald & Co. Fonds, Beaton Institute, Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS; Sinclair, "Shipowning and Investment," 25.
61. Fergusson, "Thomas Dickson Archibald."
62. *JHA* (1864), appendix 18, 17.
63. Archibald & Co., January 1863, *JHA* (1863), appendix 15, 13–14.
64. Uniacke, *Uniacke's Sketches*, 120.
65. *JHA* (1864), appendix 18, 17–18.
66. *JHA* (1865), appendix 6, 7; Brown, *Coal Fields*, 161, table 5.
67. Nova Scotia, vol. 12, 622 (E. P. Archbold, 4 September 1858), Dun & Co., BL.
68. Edward P. Archbold, Sydney, to W. A. Hendry, 21 December 1861, vol. 61, series C, Nova Scotia Commissioner of Crown Lands Fonds, NSA; Macdonald, *Coal and Iron Industries*, 21.
69. Samuel P. Fairbanks, report on coal mines, 12 February 1862, *JHA* (1862), appendix 35, 2.
70. Nova Scotia, vol. 12, 622 (E. P. Archbold, 27 January 1862), Dun & Co., BL.

71. Macdonald, *Coal and Iron Industries*, 21.
72. Edward P. Archbold, president and manager, Glace Bay Mining Company, 19 December 1862, *JHA* (1863), appendix 15, 10–12.
73. This was Archbold's projection in 1862. See his report in *JHA* (1863).
74. Uniacke, *Uniacke's Sketches*, 127.
75. Brown, *Coal Fields*, 161, table 5.
76. *JHA* (1865), appendix 6, 8–9.
77. Petition, Little Glace Bay, 12 January 1864, vol. 18, series P, RG 5, Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia Fonds, NSA.
78. Macdonald, *Coal and Iron Industries*, 23–24.
79. Nova Scotia, vol. 12, 523 (Block Ho. Mining Co., 25 March 1871), and New York, vol. 372, 943 (Block House Mining Co., 27 December 1867), Dun & Co., BL.
80. Richard Brown to R. H. Brown, 1 March 1867, vol. 151, MG 1, Richard Brown Family Fonds (hereafter Brown Fonds), NSA.
81. Masters, *Reciprocity Treaty of 1854*, 75–87; Marquis, *In Armageddon's Shadow*, 260.
82. See also Jones, *Routes of Power*, 23–87.
83. Patterson, *Patterson's History of Victoria County*, 71 and 114–15.
84. Nova Scotia, vol. 12, 625 (Chas. J. Campbell, 4 September 1858, 13 March 1863, July 1865), and 352 (C. J. Campbell, 16 March 1876), Dun & Co., BL.
85. Macdonald, *Coal and Iron Industries*, 24; Massachusetts (Boston), vol. 81, 136 (Caledonia Coal Mining Co., 30 November 1870, 29 August 1873), Dun & Co., BL.
86. New York, vol. 411, 16 (International Coal Co., 16 March 1865), Dun & Co., BL; letter to the editor by "Amicus," 7 September 1870, *Cape Breton News*, 17 September 1870.
87. Macdonald, *Coal and Iron Industries*, 23.
88. Moreover, the American Civil War resulted in a dramatic decline in American merchant shipping capacity, from 2,496,894 to 1,387,566 tons between 1861 and 1866. See Saunders, *Studies in the Economy*, 130.
89. Richard Brown to R. H. Brown, 13 July 1871, 27 July 1871, 4 August 1871, 2 June 1872, 18 July 1872, 8 April 1873, 20 May 1873, 9 September 1873, Brown Fonds, NSA.
90. Richard Brown to R. H. Brown, 1 July 1870, Brown Fonds, NSA.
91. Richard Brown to R. H. Brown, 9 October 1868 and 19 November 1870, Brown Fonds, NSA.
92. Richard Brown to R. H. Brown, 25 May 1866, 21 December 1866, 22 November 1867, 17 July 1869, 17 June 1869, 19 September 1870, and 13 August 1870, Brown Fonds, NSA.



93. Richard Brown to R. H. Brown, 18 December 1870, Brown Fonds, NSA.
94. Richard Brown to R. H. Brown, 27 August 1869, Brown Fonds, NSA.
95. New York, vol. 376, 526 (Louis J. Belloni Jr. & Co., 12 November 1870), 523 (Block Ho. Mining Co., 30 November 1868, 25 March 1871), 789 (Block House Mining Co., 28 March 1874); Nova Scotia, vol. 12, 227 (Almon, Hare & Co., 6 May 1871); New York, vol. 372, 943 (Block House Mining Co., July 1869, 25 March 1871, 4 April 1871), 1046 (Block House Mining Co., 7 January 1874, 14 February 1874), Dun & Co., BL.
96. Marshall Bourinot, St. Nicholas Hotel, New York, to Hon. M. B. Almon, 28 March 1865, file 612.16.D.f.11, Bourinot Fonds, BI, Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS.
97. The Petition of Marshall Bourinot of Sydney in the County of Cape Breton, Esquire, 18 October 1870, file 612.16.D.f.11, Bourinot Fonds, BI, Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS.
98. Nova Scotia, vol. 12, 652 (South Head Coal Mining Co, 12 and 24 August 1868), Dun & Co., BL.
99. Jones, "Frederick Newton Gisborne," [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/gisborne\\_frederic\\_newton\\_12E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/gisborne_frederic_newton_12E.html).
100. Pamphlet, *Court House, Sydney, Cape Breton, January 1877, Gisborne versus Kennelly*, 3.
101. Petitions, R. B. Sinclair, 9 January 1866 (and attached documents) and 5 March 1866, vol. 19, series P, Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia Fonds, NSA.
102. Richard Brown to R. H. Brown, 20 May 1873, Brown Fonds, NSA.
103. *Times* (London), 4 June 1878, 4.
104. *Times*, 1 June 1878, 6; *The Law Reports: Appeal Cases before the House of Lords and the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, Also Peerage Cases*, vol. 12 (London: Council for Law Reporting, 1887), 656.
105. Nova Scotia, vol. 12, 391 (W. S. Symonds & Co., 21 May 1865, 30 September 1871), Dun & Co., BL; P. S. Hamilton, chief commissioner, Department of Mines, Mines Report, 12 December 1864, *JHA* (1865), appendix 6, 6.
106. *Times*, 21 August 1871, 11; Richard Brown to R. H. Brown, 8 September 1871, Brown Fonds, NSA.
107. *Times*, 4 June 1878, 4.
108. *Times*, 14 April 1871, 4; Richard Brown to R. H. Brown, 13 July 1871, Brown Fonds, NSA.
109. *Times*, 21 August 1871, 11.

110. Concern over the potential exhaustion of domestic coal supplies emerged within Britain in the 1860s and 1870s, and by 1871, there was a “coal panic.” See Madureira, “Anxiety of Abundance,” 415.
111. Richard Brown to R. H. Brown, 5 December 1871, Brown Fonds, NSA; *Times*, 11 January 1872, 5.
112. *Times*, 3 April 1879, 12.
113. Richard Brown to R. H. Brown, 6 May 1872, Brown Fonds, NSA.
114. Richard Brown to R. H. Brown, 27 August 1872, Brown Fonds, NSA.
115. *Times*, 7 March 1873, 11.
116. *Times*, 14 March 1873, 7.
117. *Law Reports*, 657; *Times*, 6 November 1873, 4.
118. Richard Brown to R. H. Brown, 13 July 1871, Brown Fonds, NSA.
119. Richard Brown to R. H. Brown, 8 September 1871, Brown Fonds, NSA.
120. See *Law Reports*, 552–72.
121. *Times*, 1 June 1878, 6.
122. Richard Brown to R. H. Brown, 16 June 1872 and 11 February 1871, Brown Fonds, NSA.
123. Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, 200–206.
124. McKay, “Crisis of Dependent Development,” 24.
125. See, for instance, John Shaw to William C. McDonald, 25 March 1878, file 27, MG 9, William McDonald Fonds, BI, Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS; McKay, “Crisis of Dependent Development,” 35–41.
126. Minutes of Evidence, Select Committee on “Coal and Inter-provincial Trade,” Robert Belloni, 16 March 1877, *Sessional Papers*, vol. 11 (1877), appendix 4; McKay, “Crisis of Dependent Development,” 23.
127. See Acheson, “National Policy and the Industrialization,” 3–28.
128. Darwin, *Empire Project*, 150 and 159.
129. MacGillivray, “Henry Melville Whitney,” 54–56; Frank, “Cape Breton Coal Industry,” 5–13; Beckert, “American Danger,” 1137–70.
130. See Harvey, *Limits to Capital*, 190–282.
131. Pomeranz, *Great Divergence*; Wrigley, *Energy and the English Industrial Revolution*. See also Freese, *Coal*.
132. See Forsey, “Economic and Social Aspects,” 133; Frank, *J. B. McLachlan*, 179–392; Frank, “Rise and Fall of the British Empire Steel Corporation,” 3–34; Schwartzman, “Mergers in the Nova Scotia Coalfields.”

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## 2 “The Grand Old Game” The Complex History of Cricket in Cape Breton, 1863 to 1914

*John G. Reid*

Arichat, Bridgeport, Dominion, Florence, Glace Bay, Inverness, New Aberdeen, New Waterford, North Sydney, Port Hawkesbury, Sydney, Sydney Mines, Whitney Pier—some of these places are large, some small, some are in effect portions of larger communities. But what they all have in common is that they are places in Cape Breton where cricket was played as an active sport at some point—and in most cases for an extended period—during the years going up to 1914. The list is undoubtedly incomplete because a lack of documentation is one of the major obstacles to any comprehensive portrayal of the complex history of Cape Breton cricket, and yet it gives some sense of the geographical reach of the sport. The names of the clubs, similarly, give an impression of the social diversity involved. Some of the clubs simply bore the name of a city, town, or village—the Sydney Cricket Club, the Arichat Cricket Club, the Bridgeport Cricket Club, and so on—but others were more descriptive. In Sydney, not only did clubs bear titles such as the Phoenix Club, the Ramblers, the Micmacs,<sup>1</sup> the Rustics, and the Undefeatables, but they also had such counterparts elsewhere as the Renwick Club of Glace Bay and the Ramblers of North Sydney. At least six junior clubs existed at various times in Sydney alone, and among them the League of the Cross Juniors exemplified the way in which Cape Breton cricket—unlike the situation in some parts of mainland Nova Scotia—was far from being an overwhelmingly Protestant sport.

Workplace clubs were also conspicuous, examples being the Dominion Iron and Steel Club (along with the Dominion Iron and Steel Juniors), the Steel Workers Cricket Club, the Open Hearth Cricket Club, Dominion #1 Colliery, Dominion #2 Colliery, and the Intercolonial Railway Club. Not quite in the same category was the Whitney Pier Cricket Club, which of course bore the name of its neighbourhood in Sydney rather than that of a place of work, but nevertheless its membership consisted largely of steelworkers of African descent and more immediately of Caribbean origin. The Sydney Firemen's Club, meanwhile, was also not strictly speaking a workplace team, since it represented a volunteer fire department, but it too had its place in the configuration of Cape Breton's earliest codified team sport (with the possible exception of curling) and in the spectrum of social diversity that characterized it so strikingly. The diversity, it must be said, does not seem to have extended to gender. Cricket was an overwhelmingly male sport, and—unlike in mainland Nova Scotian locations such as Truro or Weymouth, where women's teams can be documented—in Cape Breton, there appears to be no surviving evidence of even limited forms of women's participation. Otherwise, however, this was a sport that to a significant degree crossed—though of course it could not and did not fully transcend—the boundaries of social class, race, ethnicity, and religion.

But interesting as all this may be, why does it really matter? Reconstructing the history of cricket in Cape Breton and in other parts of what became Atlantic Canada—or Canada more widely—has the addictive fascination of bringing to light a story that has been long forgotten. Popular memory of Cape Breton cricket has long faded, and even the historiography of Canadian cricket tends to tell a story of a sport that was allegedly an imperial sport played by a social elite, beloved of recent English immigrants but quickly falling into a deserved obscurity.<sup>2</sup> Yet in any area of sports history, context is everything. Without the ability to fit into a broader societal framework, even the most rousing story of a sport or pastime lacks any real grounding. So what is the context that gives meaning to Cape Breton's profound and long-lasting association with the sport of cricket? At the deepest level, the history of sports—like, say, the history of religion or the history of education—explores a broad element of the human experience that in some form or other has characterized every human society that has ever existed. Not only are we physical creatures whose bodies demand to be exercised, but also sporting contests offer opportunities to negotiate social differences, whether through serious



and even hostile contention or through the building of bridges via friendly competition and the socialization that accompanies it.

Cricket, in particular, has a large international historiography that reflects its ability to provide a unique global perspective on the distinctive expressions of sport in many divergent societies. Cricket originated in the south of England and reached an advanced stage of codification by the end of the eighteenth century, but even before that time, it had long been diffused to North America, and it was undoubtedly carried in a rudimentary form to the Maritime colonies by Planters and Loyalists. Yet this is only one of many examples of the diffusion of cricket in contexts that have become globalized and continue to evolve to the present day. Historians in recent years have explored this phenomenon extensively. For example, Benjamin Sacks has shown how in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Samoans adopted and transformed cricket as a way of preserving Indigenous sporting customs in the face of the disapproval of religious missionaries.<sup>3</sup> In the 1980s, refugees from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan began to play cricket in Pakistan, and some thirty years later, the Afghanistan national team made its first appearance in the Cricket World Cup, representing a sense of national identity despite civil conflict.<sup>4</sup> In Kenya, meanwhile, the ongoing efforts of the club known as the Maasai Cricket Warriors to combat the social costs of HIV/AIDS as well as environmental and cultural challenges have attracted global attention.<sup>5</sup> And of course cricket today is also one of North America's fastest-growing sports, largely as a result of the efforts of players of South Asian origin. Cricket in Cape Breton, therefore, can be examined within the framework of our understanding of a sport that offers diverse international perspectives along with sophisticated historical literature spanning a number of centuries. The idea that at one time prevailed even among some historians that cricket in Canada was somehow an exotic sport reserved largely for the social elite and for English migrants is a prime example of the kind of mythology that cannot survive the application of an informed analysis. And in Cape Breton, cricket both reflected and influenced the ways in which industrialization transformed island society and reconfigured social affinities and differences.

However, the first documentation of the organization of a cricket club in Sydney—not necessarily, of course, the first club to be formed—might, if taken in isolation, give at least partial support to the notion of cricket as a sport for the social elite. On 1 June 1863, according to the *Cape Breton News*, the Sydney Cricket Club held an organization meeting. With a membership consisting of

“twenty-six gentlemen,” the club proceeded to elect officers and cocaptains of the team. Seven of the nine individuals mentioned by the newspaper can be identified from census records, and three were lawyers. Among the lawyers was one of the two cocaptains, Newton MacKay, while the other cocaptain was Edmund Outram, described in a later census simply as a “gentleman.” The meeting was chaired by Frederick Wiley, a printer by trade who was one of three out of the seven who had been born in England. Of the others, MacKay had been born in Scotland, and the remaining three in Nova Scotia. At least two of those, John Burchell and Murray Dodd, had both parents born in Nova Scotia—census records of the time made no consistent distinction between Cape Breton and Nova Scotia, despite the years during which the colony of Cape Breton had existed autonomously. The newly elected club president, Charles Crewe-Read, was a retired militia colonel and one of three who was an adherent of the Church of England. Two were members of the Presbyterian Church of the Lower Provinces, and two were Methodists.<sup>6</sup> Readers of the *Cape Breton News* were already well aware of the extended reach of cricket within the British Empire, as the newspaper had reported in the previous year on the exploits of an English touring team in Australia,<sup>7</sup> but the composition of the Sydney Cricket Club (the Sydney in Cape Breton, that is) helped define how the sport functioned closer to home. It was an association of the locally respectable, formed in the context of the coal boom of the 1860s and the imperial orientation that went with it, although the complex stratifications of social class that would later emerge from heavy industrialization were not yet evident. By the early twentieth century, the presence of rival industrialists James Henry Plummer and James Ross as honorary club presidents—a position in which they were joined by other local worthies such as Church of England archdeacon David Smith, Bridgeport medical doctor Marcus Dodd (younger brother of Murray Dodd), and North Sydney cable station manager W. E. Earle—showed that this was an associativity that more fully embraced the upper ranks of the new industrial order.<sup>8</sup>

The association of the Sydney Cricket Club with a social elite was an element of its character that never entirely disappeared, even though the team itself became significantly diversified, especially in the early twentieth century. In this regard, the club initially stood closer to the Wanderers of Halifax than to the clubs in towns such as Digby and Yarmouth, where doctors and lawyers were regularly outnumbered by skilled artisans, retail clerks, and other members of the middle ranges of a highly localized society.<sup>9</sup> Murray Dodd,

who became a judge and a prominent Conservative politician, was just one of the early members to retain a lasting association with the Sydney club. Cricket did tend to run in families, and one of the most successful Sydney batsmen of the turn-of-the-century years was Noel Crewe-Read, a veteran of the Spanish-American War of 1898 and son of the 1863 club president.<sup>10</sup> Thus, when naval vessels from cricket-playing countries visited Sydney, a match with the Sydney Cricket Club was a standard element of the entertainment provided for the visitors. The practice began at least as early as August 1871, when James Hill—a Sydney schoolteacher and diarist—recorded the visit of the naval gun vessel *Philomel* and noted that “*Philomel’s* men and town people [were] playing cricket.”<sup>11</sup> The tradition then ranged from the steam frigate USS *Powhatan* in 1883 to the ten-thousand-ton British cruiser *Cumberland* in 1913; the encounter with officers and cadets of the *Cumberland* drew a crowd of some two thousand, and the *Sydney Daily Post*—headlining its front-page report “Fine Exhibition of the Grand Old Game”—took the attendance as a sure sign of a bright future for the sport in Cape Breton.<sup>12</sup> It was a confirmation of the comment in the rival *Sydney Daily Record* a few years earlier—reporting, also on its front page, on a practice session held by the Sydney Cricket Club in adverse weather conditions and making an implied comparison with the still-new sport of baseball—that “to watch these players fielding in pools of water ankle deep gives one an idea of the strong hold that the grand old game has upon its devotees, and is the clearest indication that though games may come and go, yet cricket, as far as Sydney is concerned, will go on forever.”<sup>13</sup>

It was also true that insofar as the Sydney Cricket Club retained elements of its socially elite status, the relationship with the sport of baseball was at times a troubled one. The histories of baseball and cricket, here and elsewhere, are sufficiently intertwined through club connections and the many nineteenth-century players who participated in both sports, so it is not extravagant to regard them in this era simply as variant disciplines of a single bat-and-ball family of sports; nevertheless, tensions could exist.<sup>14</sup> A “short but merry game” of cricket in 1902 between Sydney players and the crew of the personal steam yacht of the industrialist James Ross gave rise in the *Sydney Daily Record* to a snobbish comment on the shortcomings of “the cheap and garish attractions of baseball.”<sup>15</sup> More substantive was a bitter quarrel that originated in 1911, flared up again in late 1912, and smouldered on into 1913, when the cricket club made improvements to the grounds at Victoria Park and, while refusing to allow local baseball players to take advantage of the facilities, allegedly



**Figure 2.1.** Sydney Cricket Club, 1912–13. *Source:* Item no. 85-135-15835, Beaton Institute, Cape Breton University, Sydney, Nova Scotia.

attempted to undercut fundraising efforts by the baseball club. No less a figure than the mayor of Sydney, the prominent lawyer A. D. Gunn, reportedly declared of the cricket club that “this interference . . . has got to stop or the first thing they know the park commissioners will take their crease and turn it into a baseball field.”<sup>16</sup> Even within cricket itself, moreover, also in 1913, the Sydney Cricket Club incurred class-related and racially influenced tensions with the team known at the time as the “West India XI of the steel plant”—the forerunner of the Whitney Pier Cricket Club—when the West India players declined to play a match on the basis that the manner of the Sydney club’s invitation had shown disrespect. The matter was sarcastically reported in an item in the *Sydney Daily Post*, noting that “the southern gentlemen complain that they did not receive a formal challenge, and don’t care to indulge unless all of the preliminaries are attended to in society fashion.”<sup>17</sup> Eventually rearranged for the following weekend, the match turned out to be an ill-tempered affair, left unfinished amid allegations of time-wasting levelled against the West India club.<sup>18</sup> Thus, Cape Breton cricket in the early twentieth century carried over

certain elements of the social elitism of the Sydney Cricket Club and showed fault lines that clearly reflected social divisions.<sup>19</sup>

Yet the Sydney Cricket Club was only one part of a much more complex cricket culture, a culture that ultimately brought about substantial changes even to the club itself. As in many parts of the Nova Scotia mainland, rural and small-town cricket flourished in a number of centres. One of them was North Sydney, where a club was organized in 1874, although the *North Sydney Herald* pointed out that it was in reality a renewal of an older club. The newspaper provided no details of players or officials but did commend the benefits of “such manly out-door sports” to the young men of the town: “The time spent on the cricket-field if it may be the loss of a half-dollar or so to the hard working plodding mechanic is in reality a gain to him.”<sup>20</sup> By 1887, a rivalry had developed between North Sydney and Sydney as contenders for the trophy known as the Burchell Cup.<sup>21</sup> Also playing by that time were the cricketers of Port Hawkesbury, although almost no detailed evidence of the composition of the club has survived. In September 1885, the *Colonial Standard* of Pictou reported that “a cricket match has been arranged between the ‘Black and Tans’ of Hawkesbury and the ‘Stump Guards’ of Mulgrave.” The only players named were an unspecified member of the Bourinot family and a local medical doctor, P. A. Macdonald. Some five years later, an item in the “Hawkesbury Happenings” column of the *Enterprise* of New Glasgow expressed regret that adult cricket had succumbed to the attractions of baseball but placed its hopes in a newly formed “juvenile ‘cricket club.’”<sup>22</sup>

The nearby Arichat Cricket Club, however, is better documented, at least for the 1880s. The sport was new to Arichat when first played in 1883, and a newspaper report indicated that six members of the team had previously not even seen it played. Nevertheless, of the eleven club members who can be identified—all of playing age with the two possible exceptions of J. Edward Carbonnell and Edmund Power Flynn, both of whom were older than the others and may have been club officials—all except the English-born Carbonnell were Nova Scotia born. With the further exception of Flynn (whose parents were Irish born), all had at least one parent born in Nova Scotia. While the team also had two additional players, unrecorded in the census and likely of English origin, who were employed by the cable station in Canso and presumably travelled by water to play their cricket in Arichat, the club represented no mere importation of an exotic sport. In terms of religion, the four Roman Catholics narrowly predominated, as did the five

Irish in self-identified ethnic origin, while occupations were decidedly in the middling range: retail merchant, bookkeeper, surveyor, telegraphist, and the like. Thus, it was a small-town club highly comparable to such clubs in mainland Nova Scotia, even though of more recent foundation, except for a distinctively Cape Breton leaning toward Roman Catholics and, in this case (though not necessarily elsewhere in Cape Breton), Irish-descended Roman Catholics. Noteworthy in the latter group was David Hearn, who played for Arichat in 1883 and would later become a lawyer, Crown prosecutor, cricketer, and cricket umpire in Sydney. His kinsman James Hearn was already by 1883 a lawyer and cricketer in Sydney, and James's son William would become a prominent merchant and captain of the Sydney Cricket Club. Thus, although the Hearn family conformed to the existing social profile of the Sydney club in occupational terms, they did introduce a new element of Irish Catholicism.<sup>23</sup>

Yet the opening of the Sydney steel plant in 1901 was a turning point in many areas of life in Industrial Cape Breton, and not least in terms of sport. While it is entirely likely that coal miners played cricket long before the turn of the century, as they did in substantial numbers in both Cumberland and Pictou Counties, the era from 1901 to the eve of World War I saw an unprecedented expansion of the sport among miners, steelworkers, and related skilled trades. As early as August 1901, a Sydney team played and clearly but not one-sidedly defeated the Dominion Iron and Steel Company (DISCO) club. Among the DISCO players was John Elvey, an English-born machinist who over the ensuing decade would play for the Open Hearth club and other steel plant teams—and ultimately for the Sydney Cricket Club. A further indication of gradually increasing diversity in the Sydney team was the appearance of the Tobin brothers. From a Sydney family in which both parents were Nova Scotia born (though they had at least one Irish-born grandparent) and their father, James Tobin, still listed as a steel plant labourer in 1901 at the age of sixty-five, the younger brother Charles was an accomplished batsman who—as a locomotive fireman and later a locomotive engineer—played also for the Intercolonial Railway team. The older brother, William Tobin, meanwhile, was a fast bowler of sufficient hostility, and a cricket report in the *Record* in 1904 referred to him as “‘Billy’ Tobin, the famous bowler.”<sup>24</sup> Intermittent recruitment of both miners and steelworkers from the United Kingdom at times replenished the ranks of cricketers, and prior to one match in July 1903, an item in the *Record* deemed it worthy of mention that the Steel Plant team

to face the Sydney Cricket Club—unsuccessfully for the steelworkers, as it turned out—would have “almost a team of Englishmen.”<sup>25</sup>

But there was no shortage of home-grown players. On 1 August 1904, at the Provincial Workmen’s Association picnic held at Glace Bay, a match between the cricket teams from Dominion #1 Colliery and Dominion #2 Colliery ended early because of a dispute over umpiring. Of the twenty-two players on the field, however, fifteen can be identified. All except one were Nova Scotia born, the exception being Gilbert Darroch, a miner whose family had emigrated from Scotland when he was eight years old. Although the Dominion #1 team included Harry Dodd, son of the local physician Marcus Dodd and nephew of Murray Dodd, not surprisingly, the other players were miners or other colliery workers such as pit drivers and a machinist. The only religious denominations represented were Roman Catholics (ten) and Presbyterians (five), while in terms of stated ethnic origin, two were Irish, Harry Dodd was English, Pat Gouthro was French, and the remainder Scottish. Two—Archie McInnis and James McKillop—gave their mother tongue as Gaelic.<sup>26</sup> Many of the same players also played for the Bridgeport or New Aberdeen clubs—here, as in Pictou County, the miners’ club could readily be seen and felt as a community club.<sup>27</sup> Also a centre of coal miners’ cricket was the Florence colliery, near Sydney Mines. It was a convention in both cricket and baseball clubs to base intraclub matches on an arbitrary distinction, most often married versus single players, but revealingly, for the cricketers at the #4 colliery at Florence, it was underground workers versus bankheaders.<sup>28</sup> Although in 1903 the schedule for the recently formed Cape Breton Cricket League included only the Sydney Cricket Club, the Sydney Fire Department, the Steel Workers Club, and the Phoenix Club of Sydney, by 1907 the league had been joined by clubs from—among others—New Aberdeen, Dominion, and Bridgeport, and on 1 July of that year, the *Record* devoted a substantial part of its front page to reporting on five league matches as it observed that “local interest in the grand old game of cricket is growing apace.”<sup>29</sup> Growing pains emerged in the following season, when a dispute arose over possible poaching of players by New Aberdeen at the expense of Dominion and Bridgeport, but it still seemed to a writer in the *Record* that “cricket in local circles is surely king this season.”<sup>30</sup>

The Sydney Cricket Club, as well as playing in the local league and at one point fielding both an A and a B team, was also increasingly pursuing opportunities to play off the island. The 1908 version of what the *Post* ironically



termed the “Cricketers Deep Sea Tour,” for example, took the players to matches in Charlottetown and Pictou County.<sup>31</sup> The club also in some respects continued its traditional role as the socially elite cricket club of the island, and during the summer of 1909, it played a series of friendly matches with teams from the Royal Canadian Regiment (RCR) and the Royal Canadian Engineers. The opening match with the RCR on 22 July 1909 at Victoria Park had a festive air, as it attracted “a large attendance of the local enthusiasts of the grand old national game.”<sup>32</sup> At one level, for the Sydney Cricket Club to entertain a visiting military team was normal enough, especially as a number of the RCR players would also have been members of the Halifax Garrison team that played in the Nova Scotia Cricket League. The difference in the summer of 1909 was that the same players, when not playing cricket, were training their guns on striking miners who no doubt included cricketers from the Cape Breton League. The New Aberdeen club, for one, was forced to withdraw temporarily from the league—as the *Record* reported blandly, “the strike at the mines prevented the Aberdeen team from playing.”<sup>33</sup> New Aberdeen did resume its league schedule and on 7 August 1909 played a home match with Sydney Mines on the same day as the Sydney club played the latest of its engagements with the RCR, but the comments on the matter that may have been made by striking miners have remained undocumented.<sup>34</sup> However, the affair offered yet another indication of how sport—in this case, Cape Breton cricket—can reflect and exemplify the fracturing within any society where it is played.

In a different sense, however, the rapid evolution of Cape Breton cricket during the industrializing years gave evidence of social integration. In early July 1906, the Sydney Cricket Club arranged a preseason, intraclub match between the “Gentlemen of the Professions” and the “Non-professions,” perhaps based loosely on the long-established English encounters between the Gentlemen and the Players. The Gentlemen of the Professions had a predictable enough lineup of lawyers, doctors, and clergy, along with an engineer, a bank clerk, and the merchant William Hearn, by now a long-serving but still elegant batsman as well as being the club’s wicket-keeper. The Non-professions included, of course, William Tobin, as well as the Intercolonial Railway (ICR) train dispatcher James Murray and three of the four cricket-playing Menzies brothers—three watchmakers and a tinsmith—who were the sons of the Sydney watchmaker and jeweller John Menzies.<sup>35</sup> An important difference was that for the Gentlemen, the Sydney club tended to be their sole cricket



allegiance, while the Non-professionals also played for other teams, whether the Steel Works, the ICR team, or (since Richard, or “Dick,” Menzies was the fire chief) the Sydney Firemen. Nevertheless, with this modest degree of diversity, the Sydney Cricket Club entered the Nova Scotia Cricket League. The league had begun in 1906 as an essentially localized circuit, including three teams from Halifax and one from Windsor.<sup>36</sup> In the following year, the strength of cricket on the Pictou coalfield was shown when the newly entered Westville club took the championship by winning every game. Interest in the fielding of a Sydney team in the league, as with suggestions of a play-off series between the Nova Scotia champions and the winners of the Cape Breton League, initially went nowhere, but the Sydney club did play friendly matches against Nova Scotia Cricket League clubs before finally entering the league in 1910.<sup>37</sup>

The route to a first league championship in 1912 included following the lead of other Nova Scotia Cricket League (NSCL) teams by hiring a professional player-coach in 1911—a Mr. J. Gardiner, who had reportedly “played in the game in England, Scotland, Ireland, India, and Malta”<sup>38</sup>—and also through further diversification via the integration of African-descended players from the Steel Workers Club. In 1911, William Knight became the first—a 1910 immigrant from the Caribbean who was described in a later census as a labourer in the open hearths.<sup>39</sup> By the time of the Sydney club’s dramatic and unexpected defeat of Stellarton on 17 August 1912—“seldom, if ever, has such a scene of enthusiasm been witnessed in local sporting circles,” commented the reporter for the *Post*—one of the opening batsmen was Alfred Prescott, another steel plant worker from the Caribbean, and the winning catch was taken by Gerald Suett, who was also the Steel Workers’ captain. Given that William Hearn, now forty-two years old and a player for the Sydney Cricket Club since the 1880s, was still the wicket-keeper, the shift from exclusive gentlemen’s club to pragmatic and successful competitor in the pre-eminent league in the Maritimes was evident.<sup>40</sup> The 1913 league season finished inconclusively, as the Garrison club was unable to fulfill its scheduled commitments,<sup>41</sup> but then in 1914, Sydney had two clubs in the competition, with the entry into the league of the Whitney Pier Cricket Club. That season too went uncompleted because of the outbreak of World War I in August, but not before the Sydney and Whitney Pier clubs had met in a match attended by “a large number of citizens.”<sup>42</sup>

No matches were played in the Nova Scotia Cricket League after the declaration of war on 4 August 1914, and the formal abandonment of the season was announced just over a week later. “Owing to difficulty in obtaining men

on the part of the clubs,” the explanation went, “it has been thought best to cancel all the fixtures.”<sup>43</sup> No doubt unanticipatedly at the time, the interruption also brought an end in a larger sense to the lengthy era during which cricket had been a major—at its height, the pre-eminent—organized team sport in Cape Breton and beyond. But why so? Cricket did not stop entirely in 1914, as efforts were made to revive the sport intermittently after the war. A league including the Sydney, Sydney Mines, and Whitney Pier clubs operated at one point during the 1920s, amid plans being made to incorporate this competition into a new and expanded version of the Nova Scotia Cricket League.<sup>44</sup> Travelling in 1924 for a series of encounters with Halifax clubs, the Whitney Pier team could reportedly draw “a large crowd of cricket enthusiasts” to a match with the Halifax West Indians.<sup>45</sup> Yet by that time, there was an air of marginality about cricket that contrasted with its mainstream status in Cape Breton sporting culture up until 1914. As a playground sport or on streets and in fields, informal versions continued to be played by young people far into the twentieth century, as Don MacVicar recalled from growing up in Glace Bay and playing with his brother and other neighbourhood friends “some kind of cricket—in the field, with three tin cans, a ball about the size of a baseball”; likewise, Debbie MacIsaac recalled that in Scotchtown, cricket was played by many elementary-age children as recently as during the late 1960s and that “it just seemed to be handed down by the older kids.”<sup>46</sup> But in a larger sense, the sport had long declined. A tempting though simplistic explanation is to observe that it had been superseded by baseball. It was true that there had been debates in the Sydney press, notably in the spring of 1913—reflecting wider debates elsewhere—as to the relative merits of baseball and cricket as regards speed of play and attractiveness to spectators. To one correspondent of the *Record* in May 1913, who signed simply as “Ball Fan,” the reality was that “cricket is a grand old game, emphasis on old; baseball is new, emphasis on new, and is the game of today.”<sup>47</sup>

Others, however, would have been surprised by any prediction of cricket’s decline. As recently as in 1901, an item in the same newspaper noted that “whatever dispute there may be among the older athletes regarding the predominance of cricket or baseball, there is no doubt that with the youngsters cricket is ‘the game.’”<sup>48</sup> A column in the *Record* in May 1914 observed similarly that “cricket appears to have still a strong hold in the sport life of Sydney and no summer sport is likely to supercede [*sic*] or take its place in the community.” The item emphasized the interest among “young lads,” and another piece

in the *Post* a few weeks later likewise identified “a sign of the times” in that “in all sections of the city the youth are now daily to be seen playing the grand old national game.”<sup>49</sup> Yet there were other, contrasting signs of the times. Media coverage of baseball was one factor, as in an era when daily newspapers were hungry for copy, the Associated Press fed daily baseball news and scores to readers on a scale with which intermittent reporting of test matches in England, Australia, or South Africa—or indeed of Philadelphia cricket—could not compete. The baseball coverage continued to flow, moreover, as the United States maintained its neutral status while major cricket-playing countries saw their sporting activities curtailed by the war.

Closer to home, much as baseball continued to struggle in Cape Breton and in mainland Nova Scotia to make the transition to semiprofessional competitions, cricket as a sport had yet to reach a stable model of organization. Overt professionalism was confined to the hiring of professional player-coaches by major clubs—such as Gardiner in Sydney—although in Pictou County and elsewhere other forms of compensation for players may well have been practised. When the provincial champions from Westville were invited to visit Sydney in 1908, it was unclear whether their nonnegotiable demand for a payment of \$50 represented a fee or coverage of expenses, but certainly in English cricket at the time payment of alleged expenses was a major covert form of professionalism. Even beyond the matter of payment, participation in a provincial league had to be paid for somehow involving travel costs and the supply of equipment. The organization of the clubs, however, was essentially noncommercial, and in Sydney, even the charging of a modest admission fee to spectators was impeded—despite occasional hopeful requests for voluntary contributions—by the reality that the field in Victoria Park was on public property.<sup>50</sup> Finally, the formation of the Nova Scotia Cricket League itself—and its counterpart in southwestern Nova Scotia, the Bay of Fundy Cricket League—may have undermined the sport by eroding more traditional local cricket cultures only for the intervention of World War I to ensure that any transition to a sustainable business model on a larger scale remained incomplete. The war itself undoubtedly also had a major impact, and an item in the *Sydney Post* in 1927 noted that many of the active players of the Sydney Cricket Club had enlisted in 1914 and had been either killed or wounded or had never returned to Sydney—“and so the local club was virtually put out of business.”<sup>51</sup> In any event, with the exception of a decreasing number of

hold-outs that notably included Whitney Pier, Stellarton, and Truro, the years following World War I brought an end to cricket as a major sport in the region.

During its long active period, however, Cape Breton cricket was historically significant in a number of respects. It was, first of all, a settler sport. With settler colonialism a relatively new phenomenon in the Cape Breton of the nineteenth century and Indigenous dispossession carried out largely through environmental degradation and displacement, outdoor sports and pastimes had an important role in normalizing settlement by representing the devotion of space to activities that—for the settlers—were healthy and harmless. Cricket in Cape Breton, as in most areas of mainland Nova Scotia outside of Halifax, was unique as a summer team sport up until the very late years of the nineteenth century and so took a role not only in the social and cultural life of settler communities but also in forging social linkages that created wider networks and involved women as well as men. When the Arichat Cricket Club visited North Sydney in August 1883, it was for a “friendly encounter” and one for which “a number of their lady friends” accompanied the Arichat players.<sup>52</sup> All of this was important in the consolidation of settler society, although none of it was especially unusual or uniquely characteristic of Cape Breton—the same can just as well be observed for, say, Digby or Yarmouth Counties.<sup>53</sup> More singular is the role of cricket in a rapidly industrializing society of mobile populations in the Industrial Cape Breton of the early twentieth century. The fault lines of class and race and ethnicity were all too clear in the formation of clubs and in the sometimes troubled relationship of the Sydney Cricket Club with groups that did not fall within the bounds of its traditionally cozy status as a gentlemen’s club. Yet cricket also, however imperfectly, reflected and perhaps advanced the building of social bridges and even hesitant attempts at sport integration. Unlike in Pictou County, where the more socially elite forms of cricket in the towns of Pictou and New Glasgow declined markedly as they were overshadowed by the teams from mining communities large and small, the Sydney Cricket Club consistently shared the playing surface with teams from Sydney Mines and North Sydney on the one side to Bridgeport and New Aberdeen on the other. No doubt the experience on all sides was sometimes uncomfortable, and certainly there were times when it was fractious. But cricket in Cape Breton, and in the Maritimes more generally, was always a sport within which social differences were negotiated directly. Thus, pre-1914 cricket history in Cape Breton had its own distinctive patterns yet all the while fulfilling the more general role of sport history as a

sensitive barometer of social and cultural trajectories during an era of profound industrially influenced change for the island.

## Notes

1. The origins and membership of the club known as the Micmacs are obscure, but it is all but a certainty that the players were not Indigenous and that the club—similarly to many sports clubs in North America in this era—had simply appropriated an Indigenous name. See “Sporting Gossip,” *Sydney Daily Record* (hereafter *Record*), 9 July 1901, 6.
2. For a fuller historiographical discussion, see Reid and Reid, “Diffusion and Discursive Stabilization,” esp. 92–93.
3. Sacks, “Running Away with Itself,” 34–51; see also Sacks, *Cricket, Kirikiti*.
4. Clark and Verma, “Great Game.”
5. Taylor, “Maasai Cricket Warriors”; Nel, “Maasai Cricket Warriors.”
6. *Cape Breton News* (Sydney), 6 June 1863, 3. These and other identifications have been made primarily through matching census records, beginning with the census of 1871.
7. “Australia,” *Cape Breton News*, 12 April 1862, 3.
8. On the coal-based development of the 1860s, see chapter 1 by Donald Nerbas in this volume. For a list of the honorary presidents of the Sydney Cricket Club, see figure 2.1. On Plummer and Ross, see Roberts and Marchildon, “James Henry Plummer”; and Regehr, “James Ross.” Smith, Dodd, and Earle are identifiable through census records. Marcus Dodd, like his brother Murray, had been an early member of the Sydney Cricket Club—see J. W. Maddin, S. P. Challoner, and J. E. Elvey to Mrs. Marcus Dodd, 7 July 1924, MG 9.21.B.2, Dodd Family Fonds, Beaton Institute, Cape Breton University. For this and other Beaton Institute references, I thank Anna MacNeil. There also was considerable overlap with the officers and members of the Yacht Club, as shown in the important study by Libbey, *Portside*.
9. For an exploration of rural and small-town cricket, see Reid, “Cricketers of Digby.”
10. Fold3, “Noel Crewe-Reid,” [https://www.fold3.com/page/631465802\\_noel\\_crewe\\_read](https://www.fold3.com/page/631465802_noel_crewe_read).
11. Entry of 12 August 1871, MG 2.2.7.5, Memorandum Book, 9 March 1871–21 May 1872, Hill Family Fonds, Beaton Institute, Cape Breton University.
12. “Fine Exhibition of the Grand Old Game,” *Sydney Daily Post* (hereafter *Post*), 19 June 1913, 1; see also “Sydney Lost Cricket Game Yesterday,” *Record*, 19 June

- 1913, 6. On the visit of the Powhatan, see “Local Items,” *North Sydney Herald*, 10 October 1883, 2.
13. “Dominion Day Cricket Match,” *Record*, 3 July 1906, 1.
  14. On the relationship between cricket and baseball, see especially Howell, *Northern Sandlots*, 28–36. Among prominent Nova Scotian players who went back and forth between the two codes was Harry Saunders of Pictou County (both Westville and Stellarton) during the early years of the twentieth century; see “Sporting Notes,” *Free Lance*, 22 June 1910, 12; and unattributed newspaper clipping, n.d., MG9, vol. 122A, 200–202, James W. Power Scrapbook, Nova Scotia Archives. On a similar phenomenon in New England, see Fauske, ““Team That Carried Everything,”” esp. 6.
  15. “Cricket Redivivus,” *Record*, 20 August 1902, 1.
  16. “No Baseball on Cricket Grounds,” *Record*, 9 May 1911, 1; “Is Baseball Fit Game for Gentlemen?,” *Post*, 23 September 1912, 8; “Baseball Meeting Was Very Largely Attended,” *Record*, 1 May 1913, 6. On the early years of baseball in Cape Breton, see Howell, *Northern Sandlots*, 133–34.
  17. “The Ayes and Bees Today,” *Post*, 2 August 1913, 12.
  18. “Today’s Cricket Match Unfinished,” *Post*, 11 August 1913, 5. These tensions no doubt also reflected the perceived threat to “whiteness” that proceeded, as shown in chapter 5 by Martha Walls in this volume, from the increasing diversity of Whitney Pier’s Indigenous, Caribbean, and other residents.
  19. On Caribbean migration to Cape Breton and the role of cricket in the community, see Bonner, “Industrial Island,” esp. 46–47. On social institutions and cohesion in that community, see also chapter 3 by Claudine Bonner in this volume.
  20. “A Word for Our Sports,” *North Sydney Herald*, 9 September 1874, 2.
  21. “Cricket,” *North Sydney Herald*, 7 September 1887, 3.
  22. “Port Mulgrave,” *Colonial Standard* (Pictou), 8 September 1885, 2; “Hawkesbury Happenings,” *Enterprise* (New Glasgow), 26 July 1890, 3.
  23. For listings of members of the Arichat Cricket Club, see “Cricket—Canso vs. Arichat,” *North Sydney Herald*, 8 August 1883, 3; “Arichat Items,” *North Sydney Herald*, 15 August 1883, 2; “Local Items,” *North Sydney Herald*, 29 August 1883, 3; “Correspondence,” *North Sydney Herald*, 7 September 1887, 2.
  24. “Saturday a Day of Sport,” *Record*, 15 August 1904, 1; “Sports and Amusements,” *Record*, 9 August 1909, 6.
  25. “City and General,” *Record*, 30 July 1903, 3. A report of the match was carried out a few days later: “First Match of Cricket League,” *Record*, 3 August 1903, 5.
  26. “P.W.A. Picnic Great Success,” *Record*, 2 August 1904, 5.
  27. On Pictou County clubs, see Reid, “Home of Cricket,” 40–41, 44–45; on the convergence of class and community, in this instance involving power

- dynamics in local governance, see also Frank, “Company Town/Labour Town,” 177–96.
28. “Cricket Club at Florence,” *Post*, 17 July 1913, 10.
  29. “C. B. Senior Cricket League,” *Record*, 11 August 1903, 1; “Cape Breton County Cricket League,” *Record*, 20 June 1907, 1; “The Game of Cricket,” *Record*, 1 July 1907, 1, 8.
  30. “Saturday’s Cricket Games,” *Record*, 29 June 1908, 1; “Cricket Games,” *Record*, 3 August 1908, 8.
  31. “The Cricketers Deep Sea Tour,” *Post*, 14 August 1908, 1.
  32. “News of Local and General Interest,” *Post*, 23 July 1909, 5.
  33. “Sports and Amusements,” *Record*, 26 July 1909, 6; on the military intervention of 1909, see Frank, *J. B. McLachlan*, 99–101. There were also implications for the Garrison cricketers, with a series of postponed games in the internal Garrison league attributed to “many of the troops being away to Glace Bay and Inverness”; “Wanderers Defeated Stellarton,” *Halifax Chronicle*, 23 August 1909, 6. In the following year, the composite Garrison team had to postpone a match in Sydney because of players being similarly “upon active service” in Springhill; “1st Cricket Game at Victoria Park,” *Post*, 16 July 1910, 1.
  34. “Sports and Amusements,” *Record*, 7 August 1909, 6.
  35. “Four Games of Cricket,” *Record*, 6 July 1906, 1.
  36. See “Cricket in Nova Scotia,” *American Cricketer*, 1 June 1907, 112.
  37. “Big Cricket Tournament,” *Post*, 8 September 1906, 1; “Outlook for Cricket Season,” *Record*, 14 June 1907, 1.
  38. “Cricket Prospects are Very Bright,” *Post*, 25 May 1911, 1; “Provincial Cricket,” *Standard* (Glace Bay), 5 June 1911, 5.
  39. For Knight’s employee record, see DISCO Human Resources File 34-38594, Beaton Institute, Cape Breton University; see also the death record at Nova Scotia Archives, “Nova Scotia Births, Marriages, and Deaths,” <https://www.novascotiagenalogy.com/ItemView.aspx?ImageFile=1961-5503&Event=death&ID=433485>. As Claudine Bonner points out in a chapter in this volume, the census description of “labourer” would frequently reflect the hiring on a racialized basis of Caribbean workers for low-paying work when in reality they were highly skilled.
  40. “Sensational Cricket Win for Sydney,” *Post*, 19 August 1912, 1.
  41. “Cricket League Will Likely Blow Up,” *Daily Echo* (Halifax), 16 September 1913, 12.
  42. “Sydney Wins First League Cricket Game,” *Post*, 13 July 1914, 1. For a discussion of this match in a different context, see Reid and Reid, “Diffusion and Discursive Stabilization,” 98–99.
  43. “No More Cricket,” *Daily Echo*, 13 August 1914, 12.

44. Canon George A. Francis, "History of the Black Population at Whitney Pier," MG 7 C 1, Beaton Institute, Cape Breton University; Bonner, "Industrial Island," 46; "Local Cricketers in First Practice Use New Wickets," *Record*, 23 June 1924, 1.
45. "West Indians of Sydney Defeated Local Cricketers," *Evening Mail* (Halifax), 27 June 1924, 7; "Local Cricketers in First Practice Use New Wickets," *Record*, 23 June 1924, 1.
46. Ann Mosher MacVicar and Don MacVicar, email communication to the author, 19 November 2021; Debbie MacIsaac, email communication to the author, 17 December 2018. I sincerely thank these and other correspondents who have shared with me their valuable recollections of children's informal cricket.
47. "Baseball Is the Game of the Present Time," *Record*, 6 May 1913, 6.
48. "The Future for Cricket," *Record*, 4 June 1901, 6.
49. "Annual Meeting of Cricket Club," *Record*, 27 May 1914, 6; "Interest in Cricket," *Post*, 24 June 1914, 5.
50. See, for example, "The Local Cricketers Are Making Big Preparations," *Post*, 4 August 1908, 1.
51. "Cricket in Sydney Will Be Revived," *Post*, 4 August 1927, 5.
52. "Local Items," *North Sydney Herald*, 22 August 1883, 3; "Local Items," *North Sydney Herald*, 29 August 1883, 3.
53. See Reid, "Cricketers of Digby and Yarmouth Counties"; see also Reid, "Sport, Environment, and Appropriation," 242–54.

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### 3 **Bridging Religion and Black Nationalism**

#### **The Founding of St. Philips African Orthodox Church and the Universal Negro Improvement Association Hall in Whitney Pier, 1900–1930**

*Claudine Bonner*

The community of Whitney Pier in Sydney, Nova Scotia, is a by-product of the arrival and settlement of immigrant labourers, many drawn to work in the Dominion Iron and Steel Company (DISCO), opened in 1901 by industrialist Henry Melville Whitney. Among these workers were men from established African Nova Scotian communities, African Americans from industrial centres in the United States, and men who came from the British West Indies.<sup>1</sup> They arrived and either settled on the company grounds or sought housing nearby just outside the gates of the coke ovens.<sup>2</sup> They built a vibrant community with a rich set of associated institutions. Membership in some of these institutions kept this community closely tied to Africa and its diaspora. The most prominent examples were the local affiliates of Marcus Mosiah Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and Sydney's St. Philip's African Orthodox Church, the only Canadian branch of this church. Both organizations were headquartered in New York City with memberships throughout the diaspora.

The last decade has provided scholarship underscoring how the UNIA not only maintained a strong presence in the lives of many Blacks in Canada but also served as a means of social cohesion.<sup>3</sup> The organization provided opportunities for maintaining and passing on the culture while also creating diasporic networks in the first decades of the twentieth century. Historian

Carla Marano has provided extensive evidence of the breadth of the organization across Canada, drawing on the records of the UNIA both nationally and transnationally.<sup>4</sup> Marano and other scholars have highlighted the ways in which the organization existed within a social space that transcended national boundaries and upheld the main tenets of Garvey's philosophies on race, which underscored the importance of self-help, mutual aid, and economic development for Blacks, both on the African continent and in the diaspora.

This chapter seeks to add to the growing literature on the UNIA's role in Canada by exploring its presence in the Whitney Pier community and its relationship to the founding of St. Phillip's African Orthodox Church.<sup>5</sup> By exploring these social institutions within the Whitney Pier community, this chapter demonstrates the ways in which Garvey's ideology, as representative of a type of Black nationalism, was expressed in the particular context of the Pier and helped Black residents produce spaces for themselves within a context of domination and objectification.<sup>6</sup>

In the early decades of the twentieth century, people of African descent in the diaspora experienced a series of changes in racial consciousness. These were represented in art, literature, politics, and religious activities, calling for changes in the working and living conditions of Black citizens. Building on the impetus of turn-of-the-century political movements like Sylvester Williams's African Association, which sought to protect the rights of and promote solidarity among Blacks living under British imperial rule, several groups and conferences led by African and African diasporic activists and intellectuals arose in the early decades of the twentieth century. Among them was Garvey's Pan-Africanist movement.

The Universal Negro Improvement and Conservation Association (UNIA) and African Communities (Imperial) League (ACL) were both founded in 1914 by Jamaican-born Garvey.<sup>7</sup> The UNIA was founded as a benevolent fraternal organization for African-descended peoples, while the ACL was the commercial and political wing of the organization.<sup>8</sup>

Garvey was a self-educated man who had worked as a journalist and printer in Central America, Jamaica, and Britain. In 1916, he moved to Harlem, New York, where he established headquarters for his new organization. The goal of the UNIA was to "unite all the negro peoples of the world into one great body."<sup>9</sup> This message was readily received by Black Americans, who were struggling to define themselves beyond the negative perceptions of white

America. As many made their way back to America after World War I, they found themselves returning to a country that was ill-prepared to treat them as equals and instead sometimes met them with violence. Not only was their citizenship challenged, but for these men, their very manhood was in question. While many still experienced some forms of racism in Europe, they were ill prepared to return to the status quo at home. Many were ready for a race-conscious ideology and Black nationalism.<sup>10</sup>

While there are many understandings of the Black nationalist ideology, for the most part, it embodies a search for political, economic, and cultural autonomy from whiteness.<sup>11</sup> Brown and Shaw also highlight that the complexity of Black nationalism means it is multidimensional and “comprised of many schools of thought.” Therefore, they contend that there may be different ways in which Black nationalism presents itself.<sup>12</sup> As a Black nationalist, Garvey was committed to instilling racial pride. He believed that Blacks needed to be self-sufficient because the system of white racism was too entrenched within American society. He advocated the formation of or settlement in a nation of Africans for Africans. He believed strongly in the “confraternity among the race; to promote the spirit of pride and love.”<sup>13</sup>

According to historian Robert Hill, the political ideology at the heart of Garveyism was born out of a “fiercely proud and independent peasantry” from living in the postemancipation Caribbean, coming together with the unbridled optimism of America.<sup>14</sup> Garvey was emboldened by America, where he saw endless possibilities for political and economic success. His message was clearly needed when the UNIA came into being, as evidenced by the rapid growth of the organization in the United States, the Caribbean, Latin America, Africa, and Canada. This growth was aided by the increasing migration of African-descended people throughout the Americas and beyond. Black workers made their way up and out of the Caribbean Basin by ship, travelled throughout North America on trains, and made their way out of the South by various means as part of a transnational workforce responding to opportunity. As they moved throughout the Americas, these migrants took the UNIA and Garvey’s message with them. This was the birth of Garveyism, a Pan-Africanist philosophy that was to become a global mass political movement of mostly poor and working-class Blacks, collaborating across borders to achieve a vision of social, political, and economic freedom. The UNIA had established seven hundred branches in thirty-eight states by the early 1920s.

While chapters existed in larger urban areas such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, Garvey's message also reached small towns across the country.<sup>15</sup>

Garvey was the publisher and editor of the *Negro World* weekly newspaper, which was mostly in English with some Spanish and French pages. The publication circulated the globe, calling on Black people everywhere to take a stance and challenge their oppression. Through the pages of the *Negro World*, readers could see they were not alone—the United Fruit Company worker in Guatemala could see that they had the same struggles as their brethren on the sugarcane plantations in Cuba and even those in the Canadian steel plants and coal mines. With the *Negro World*, Garvey called on Black people to work toward the liberation of Africa and the acquisition of political and economic power. People responded because they could identify with each other through the mutuality of race and their status as second-class citizens. They saw the UNIA as a place where they were celebrated and could find means to fulfill their hopes and dreams.<sup>16</sup> Garvey set up a Liberty Hall in Harlem in 1917, and over the next five years, the organization grew to encompass over a million members in Liberty Halls across three continents.<sup>17</sup>

According to historian Tony Martin, Garvey envisioned a network of Black “business enterprises established by UNIA branches all over the world . . . linked, according to Garvey’s grand design, into a worldwide system of Pan-African economic cooperation.”<sup>18</sup> Throughout the years of its existence, branches of the UNIA worked actively to accomplish this, purchasing properties and creating businesses, striving for economic freedom.

## The UNIA in Canada

There were thirty-two UNIA halls established throughout Canada. Among them, twelve were in Nova Scotia, with three on the island of Cape Breton. These three halls were established in Whitney Pier, Glace Bay, and New Waterford, all communities with Caribbean migrants.<sup>19</sup> Marano points out that people from the Caribbean often joined the UNIA because of their frustration over their low-paying jobs. Historian Winston James points to the “rigorous gatekeeping on the basis of race,” often encountered by skilled workers from the Caribbean, as the impetus for turning to Black nationalism.<sup>20</sup> In Sydney, the Caribbean migrants tended to be hired as labourers, relegated mostly to low-status and low-paying positions in the steel company. Most were employed in the blast furnace, the dirtiest and most dangerous part of the

steel-making process, and forced to live in the most basic accommodations.<sup>21</sup> They were also not allowed to join labour unions until years later. A separate meeting space for ethnic workers (which most likely did not include Blacks from the US or the Caribbean) was not created until the early 1920s.<sup>22</sup> This suggests a context that needed an organization such as Garvey's, one that sought to address the needs of Black workers. At the 1920 UNIA International Convention in Harlem, St. Vincent native George Creese, a shoemaker by trade, was present as a member of the Canadian delegation. Creese was an active member of the UNIA in New Aberdeen (Glace Bay), Nova Scotia, and even served as UNIA high commissioner of Canada. At this convention, Creese provided the international audience with insight into the lives of Black Cape Bretoners:

We have many [Black] skilled mechanics, printers, carpenters, masons, photographers, engineers, riveters, but they cannot get employment at their trades. Hence they have to seek work in the steel plants as labourers, as bricklayers, and as firemen. . . . A system exists there of collecting a poll tax, everyone being required to pay \$10 for police protection, good streets, etc. If the tax is not paid, the police call at the house and take the individual to jail. This practice applies only to the colored people. . . . Housing conditions, too, are deplorable in Eastern Canada and in Nova Scotia. Rents are excessively high.<sup>23</sup>

Creese's vivid picture of life for Black community members in the 1920s echoes the issues raised by Winston James about the lack of access skilled tradespeople from the Caribbean had in the workforce. Discussion of the poll tax and its impact on the Black community is also interesting. In its early years, the city of Sydney, incorporated in 1904, was very reliant on its poll taxes. The taxes were collected by the local constables, and the city charter provided a warrant to the officers, which allowed for the seizure of property in cases of delinquent payment. When individuals were unable to provide the monetary value of this property to pay their taxes, the warrant allowed for the arrest of their person.<sup>24</sup> While the charter made no reference to race, the financial circumstances of the Black residents in Sydney may have meant that paying the poll tax was not always within their means and could have resulted in their arrests for nonpayment. This quote is our only evidence to date, since the records for the Sydney Police during this period are believed to have been lost in one of several fires in the city in the first decades of the twentieth century.

At the 1921 UNIA convention, the Canadian delegates “spoke very encouragingly of that country as a good field for the association, declaring there was little or no opposition to the movement [coming to Sydney] the chief difficulty being the serious economic conditions existing.”<sup>25</sup> Black Canadians provided clear evidence of their financial situations.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to labour and other economic woes being voiced by the Black community, the racial climate would have also been trying. On 28 March 1917, the SS *Southland* sailed out of Halifax harbour with over four thousand troops, including members of what would become known as Canada’s first and only Black battalion. Their departure marked the end of a three-year struggle on the part of African Canadian communities across the country, who had sought inclusion in the Canadian Expeditionary Force. The history of this group demonstrates the courage and determination of African Canadians to serve their country, despite the harmful effects of racial discrimination and the long-standing prejudices that prevailed regarding Black courage, industry, and patriotism. At the outbreak of World War I, Black men were routinely turned away from recruiting stations across the country, although no official legislation denied their enlistment. According to historian James Walker, this was in keeping with the general sentiments surrounding the concept of “race” during this period.<sup>27</sup> For nearly two years, Canadian Blacks and other visible minorities petitioned the government, seeking to enlist in the armed forces as part of their national duty. Many also saw their enlistment as a means of being seen and treated as men in contexts where they were considered second-class citizens.<sup>28</sup> Among this group were many of the recently arrived Caribbean migrants residing in Whitney Pier.

Across Canada, over four hundred Black men enlisted and served in military units. However, several stories abound about Black men willing to take up arms but being rebuffed. For example, a group of approximately fifty Black men from Sydney, both Canadian and West Indian, attempted to enlist sometime in 1916 but were told they were not wanted in a “white man’s war.”<sup>29</sup> A statement from Major General W. Gwatkin, then chief of the general staff, provides evidence of the racial attitudes that prevailed in the Canadian military at the time. He wrote in a memo dated April 1916,

Nothing is to be gained by blinking facts. The civilized negro is vain and imitative; in Canada he is not being impelled to enlist by a high sense of duty; in the trenches he is not likely to make a good fighter;



and the average white man will not associate with him on terms of equality. Not a single commanding officer in Military District No. 2 is willing to accept a coloured platoon as part of his battalion; and it would be humiliating to the coloured men themselves to serve in a battalion where they were not wanted.<sup>30</sup>

In the face of such adamant refusal, their hopes were not easily met. To gain access to the military, they would have to openly challenge the government to enforce their civil rights.<sup>31</sup> Extensive pressure was placed on both the military and the country's government by members of the clergy, educators, and community leaders. A long series of letters and petitions survive, revealing the determination of African Canadians to demonstrate their loyalty to Canada and to the Crown. The fact that Canada was struggling to meet the year-end goal of half a million volunteers in 1916 would have likely contributed to the change of heart in terms of enlisting Black soldiers. "The need for more men was acute, especially as enlistment figures fell . . . and recruiting officers reached out to find men where they could."<sup>32</sup> The long wait and perhaps the negative experiences of being denied by the military made it difficult for the new No. 2 to find men, and the unit was faced with the same issues of diminishing volunteer numbers, even with the Borden government having passed the 1917 Military Service Act, a law mandating conscription. Records suggest that with the passage of this act, Canadian military commanders were concerned with not being able to recruit enough Black men for the unit, in contrast to a year prior, when Black men were routinely turned away.<sup>33</sup> Conscription forced several Black men from the Sydney Black community to enlist, even though they had previously been refused access to the military.<sup>34</sup>

The No. 2 Construction Battalion received authorization on 5 July 1916 and recruited men from across the nation. During this period, the January 1917 issue of the *Atlantic Advocate* posted a strong letter urging "every colored man and woman" to "take a pardonable pride in the battalion." The letter also "appeals to patriotism" and urges those wishing to "shape the future of the race" to join the No. 2.<sup>35</sup> The men of the battalion joined in the recruitment efforts, as noted in the *Advocate*, which described concerts being put on by the coloured band of the No. 2. At strength, the battalion was made up of 605 men of all ranks from across Canada, the Caribbean, and the United States and 19 officers, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Daniel H.

Sutherland, with the sole Black officer being their captain and chaplain, Reverend William A. White.<sup>36</sup>

The struggles of the unit would continue on the other side of the Atlantic as well. As members of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, most Black Canadians had not been permitted to bear arms nor to serve in integrated units. Upon arrival in Europe, the limited size of the No. 2 resulted in it being relegated to serving as a labour company attached to the Forestry Corps. With just over six hundred men, the Canadian unit was understrength for a battalion but overstrength for a company. The only viable solution was to redesignate the unit, which meant a reduction in rank for Sutherland to major so he could remain with his unit. While stationed in France, the unit was used to perform logging duties, build roads, and restore buildings, among other construction jobs.<sup>37</sup> Though the No. 2 Construction Battalion worked side by side with white units, they had to remain segregated in their non-working activities. They endured multiple slights in their time overseas, many of which were stark reminders of the realities of a racialized social order both there and in Canada.<sup>38</sup> As Walker made clear, “Throughout the ranks of the Allies, with the partial exception of the French, non-white soldiers and workers were humiliated, restricted, and exploited. It was simply not their war.”<sup>39</sup> These military experiences stood in contrast to the many positive interactions between Black soldiers and the civilian populations in many European spaces, which were unlike the everyday experiences of racial subjugation to which they returned in North America.

Returning after the war were men like Harold Best, who had arrived in Canada in July 1917 from Barbados and had joined the Nova Scotia Regiment in May 1918.<sup>40</sup> The Canada to which he returned was in many ways quite different from the one he had left. With the men having gone off to war, many communities had called upon women and workers of colour, including even more Caribbean migrants, to take on their jobs in the factories, the mines, and elsewhere. Black employees gained access to spaces of employment that had previously been closed to them.<sup>41</sup>

As Walker notes, the experience of these men in World War I provides evidence for the racial sentiments in Canada during this period. Once again, the stereotypes of the period erased logic and evidence. The dissatisfaction Blacks felt with conditions at home in Great Britain, Canada, and the US after World War I made the Garvey movement very appealing globally.<sup>42</sup> In Sydney, the Liberty Hall opened on Lingan Road in 1919, with a membership

of about 250.<sup>43</sup> Grenadian-born Alvinus Calder became its first president. Marano notes, “The *Negro World* reported that ‘down in Sydney more than half the Negro population’ claims membership to the UNIA and they ‘labor with the most indefatigable determination to see the realization of the highest hopes—a free and redeemed Negro race.’”<sup>44</sup>

As perhaps the clearest depiction of the presence of the UNIA in Sydney, in 1921, the local *Sydney Post* shared a photograph depicting members of the UNIA marching band on Laurier Street in Whitney Pier, followed by members of the Black Cross Nurses (BCN) in uniform as well as others carrying banners proclaiming, “Africa for the Africans.” The photograph also depicts a large group of Black onlookers.<sup>45</sup> The UNIA band appears to have been an active part of the community, playing at parades, funerals, and political meetings, sometimes with the West Indian band, which was also active.<sup>46</sup> As one community member, whose father was a member of the band, recalled, “They played for parades, and anything that required music, these men were available.”<sup>47</sup>

While they remembered the bands, community members also recalled the BCN in Whitney Pier. One woman noted, “The Black Cross Nurses was an organization very similar to your community workers, where they had people from the community who would, when women had their babies . . . go into the home and cook and clean and help look after the other children . . . it was a support for other women in the communities.” Community elder Beryl Braithwaite also remembered the nurses as mainly midwives who had been going around the community for years and years, going into women’s homes and helping with childcare and housework.<sup>48</sup> BCN, as an auxiliary of the UNIA, was expected to “carry on a system of relief and . . . attend to the sick of the Division to which the public Auxiliary is attached.”<sup>49</sup> Once they were formally chartered, each UNIA division would have had its own BCN. The BCN became a formalized professional body with specialized training.

According to historian Natanya Duncan,

Within the auxiliary, careful instruction was provided to each member, in most cases by either a trained nurse or doctor. At the end of courses that lasted from six months to a year, a graduation ceremony was held and diploma issued prior to the donning of either the all-white uniform worn in public events or the green and white uniform worn while at work, which each member had to purchase personally.<sup>50</sup>

In Toronto, the BCN was a popular auxiliary, and its members were required to take the St. John's Ambulance course in first aid.<sup>51</sup> It is not known if the Nova Scotia BCN required its membership to complete St. John's Ambulance training as well. Active in a period when nursing schools were not admitting women of colour, BCNs served an important role in the Black community, creating both a practical and a representational space. For example, during a period when there would have been limited public health services, they ensured that Black women in the community had access to pre- and postnatal care and education. This photograph and the oral history both tell us there were BCNs in Nova Scotia. According to Marano, the New Aberdeen Division organized a BCN in 1921.<sup>52</sup> Garveyites from the different Atlantic communities travelled readily to meetings and events at others. As Braithwaite noted, "They would come to Sydney if there was special meetings . . . they had a UNIA in New Waterford also and they would come to meetings here in Sydney."<sup>53</sup> Marano describes a tight-knit community in Glace Bay, centred around the UNIA Hall, but visits between community halls for meetings and social events suggest a dedicated Caribbean community across Cape Breton. The *Negro World* provides extensive examples of events in which all three Cape Breton divisions actively took part. Some include a special Easter service put on by the New Aberdeen Division in May 1922, with members from the other two in attendance; a private convention held for all three divisions in Glace Bay in 1933; and all three divisions attending an Empire Day picnic held in Glace Bay in May 1935.<sup>54</sup>

According to the *Nova Scotia Gleaner*, the Whitney Pier UNIA Hall had thirty-one financial members on the books as of their meeting on 15 September 1929.<sup>55</sup> The issue of "financial members" versus others is something Marano raises. She notes the existence of a two-tiered system of membership in the UNIA, with active members who paid dues and regular members who attended events and volunteered their time.<sup>56</sup> The organization was still clearly an active part of the community's social life, with the UNIA band playing most events and members of the community joining in celebration at their annual picnics, participating in boat cruises chartered by the UNIA, and attending UNIA parades. The Liberty Hall was at the centre of many of the events and held dances, dramatic events, musicals, and athletic activities.<sup>57</sup> Braithwaite remembers, "Our entertainment was at the UNIA Hall, which was on Lingan Road. They would have dances and concerts. We held beauty contests and they had their meetings there also in the UNIA."<sup>58</sup>

## St. Philip's African Orthodox Church, Sydney, Nova Scotia

St. Philip's African Orthodox Church is the only church of this denomination in Canada. It is part of a larger network of churches that arose out of New York City in the 1920s that were dedicated to a belief that Black Episcopalians should have their own denomination. The church focuses on apostolic succession, with Peter the Apostle as its first bishop. According to Braithwaite, the church came about partly because "the coloured people used to go to the churches down the Pier, and remarks were passed that they didn't want Blacks in their church, so they had to find some place of their own."<sup>59</sup> Most Black families in Whitney Pier have been members of St. Philip's, although that membership appears to be fluid for some. For example, Elizabeth Beaton noticed that some of the Caribbean names appearing in the records of Holy Redeemer Catholic Parish Church also appear in the records of the Victoria Methodist Church.<sup>60</sup> To explain this, perhaps we only need to think of the Black church and what it has come to represent in the Americas. According to African American history and religion scholar Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, there were many roles played by the church in Black community life. It served as "an agent of social control, forum of discussion and debate, promoter of education and economic cooperation, and arena for the development and assertion of leadership."<sup>61</sup> Perhaps in cases where people's names showed up in more than one congregation, multiple churches served multiple functions in their lives—spiritual as well as social. Embracing Black nationalist religious ideology, the church also provided its membership with a brotherhood that spanned the globe.

To understand the formation of St. Philip's, we need to take a look at the history of the formation of the African Orthodox Church (AOC) in Harlem, which is closely affiliated with the history of the UNIA. This church was founded by George Alexander McGuire, who, like Garvey, had been born in the British West Indies. McGuire was born in Antigua in 1866 and lived there until he completed his studies at the theological seminary in 1894. He then made his way to the United States, where he worked for several years as an ordained Episcopal priest, mainly to Black congregants. In 1910, he received his medical degree in Boston, after which he served as a Protestant Episcopal minister until 1913, when he returned home to Antigua and worked as both a family doctor and a minister. In his years in the Episcopal Church, McGuire had been disheartened by the racism he saw, and on his return to the US, he became involved with other independent Black Episcopal clergy who were

also dissatisfied with the church. They were disappointed at the subordinate role of Black congregants, and West Indian ministers recognized that they had received better treatment in the West Indian Anglican church. With this realization, McGuire began to articulate his belief in the importance of and need for separate spaces for Black adherents to worship.<sup>62</sup>

Garvey and McGuire became acquainted in 1918 on McGuire's return to America, and McGuire became involved with the UNIA, rising very quickly through the ranks. Both men held similar views in terms of racial pride and self-determination, and both thought the church should work to dispel notions of Black inferiority and advance the cause of the Negro in America. Garvey named McGuire chaplain general of the UNIA. In this role, McGuire directed the other clergy within the UNIA as they saw to the spiritual needs of the membership.<sup>63</sup>

McGuire sought ways of establishing an independent Black church, which he was able to do on 9 November 1919, when he resigned from the Reformed Episcopal Church and founded the Church of the Good Shepherd as an independent Episcopal church. McGuire's resignation was necessary because his standing in the UNIA was now in conflict with the fact that the Reformed Episcopal Church possessed a mostly white membership and leadership. The need for a Black church meant he needed to separate from the Reformed Church.<sup>64</sup> His new church was renamed the African Orthodox Church in 1921. Perhaps this was to indicate its connections to the UNIA and the greater cause of Black nationalism.<sup>65</sup>

In his role as chaplain general of the UNIA, McGuire continued working toward the formation of the independent orthodox church, expecting that it would become the church of the UNIA. For example, he authored the UNIA's *Universal Negro Ritual*, modelled after the *Book of Common Prayer*, as well as the *Universal Negro Catechism*. These were foundational texts for the UNIA, serving to guide the order of services and to educate the membership on the history, purpose, and theology of the UNIA.<sup>66</sup> However, in 1921 when McGuire was elected bishop of the Independent Episcopal Church, while both the election and the formation of the AOC were noted in the *Negro World*, there was a clear statement made disassociating the UNIA from the AOC. The editorial clarified the position of the UNIA, indicating that they favoured all churches but adopted none as the UNIA church.<sup>67</sup> Despite this, McGuire continued in his dual roles as the spiritual leader of the UNIA and as the bishop of the new AOC. He continued his quest to build a church to unite all Negroes in a

spiritual space they could call their own. He founded, edited, and published the journal of the AOC, the *Negro Churchman*, which kept him in direct contact with his growing flock. McGuire was apparently unsatisfied with his status and sought consecration from the Russian Orthodox Church, which refused his request, since the AOC would not allow itself to become part of the Russian Orthodox Church. He next approached the American Catholic Church, and Archbishop Joseph Rene Villate agreed to consecrate McGuire. A ceremony subsequently took place on 29 September 1921, at the Church of Our Lady of Good Death in Chicago.<sup>68</sup> McGuire was enthroned as bishop of the new AOC the following day in New York City.<sup>69</sup> Again, the *Negro World* both acknowledged the events and made clear that the UNIA endorsed the AOC only as much as it endorsed all of the other churches with which its members were affiliated and pointed out that Bishop McGuire had resigned from his position as chaplain general upon his election to the episcopate.<sup>70</sup> There were issues between McGuire and Garvey, evidenced by the *Negro World* going as far as warning readers that any suggestion of a different relationship between the AOC and the UNIA was deception on the part of the speaker.<sup>71</sup>

In a speech given in New York on 18 December 1921, Garvey referred to an incident of particular relevance to this discussion. According to Garvey, McGuire had accused him of sending telegrams when he had not, saying,

I did not send telegrams about the doctor [McGuire] to Sydney, N.S. It was after an appeal was made to me from Nova Scotia by the High Commissioner, Hon. G. D. Creese, of the Dominion of Canada, that through skillful designs they had changed the Liberty Hall of Sydney, N.S. into some orthodox church and that orthodox church had taken away the lease of the building of the UNIA, and that there was great confusion and the people wanted to know whether we were first for the orthodox church or for the Universal Negro Improvement Association, and I sent a telegram to Sydney N.S., that we had nothing to do with McGuire's church, and that those people who desired to go to him could go, but those who stuck by the association would receive the protection of the UNIA. What else could you expect me to do?<sup>72</sup>

This speech highlights a public and slanderous rift between the two men at this juncture. The rift would be short-lived, with McGuire being reinstated as chaplain general in 1924 after making public apologies. Perhaps this public severing of relations had been done to emphasize the distinctions

between the two organizations. Perhaps Garvey had made a public show of his rift with McGuire to assuage the clerics of other UNIA denominations, who were believed to be at odds with McGuire.<sup>73</sup> The speech notably indicates that Garvey was directly in touch with the Whitney Pier community and that theirs was a known division of the UNIA. It also raises questions about McGuire's process in terms of establishing St. Philip's in the Pier—when the church was formed and whether or not the members thought they were joining a UNIA church. Did that shape people's willingness to join? Did McGuire knowingly push this agenda, or did he believe this new church was going to become a part of the UNIA? As noted by Marano, "While the AOC was never the official church or an auxiliary of the UNIA, the two organizations were linked together in time, doctrine, and even membership, especially in Sydney, Nova Scotia."<sup>74</sup>

In June 1921, responding to a request from Black steelworkers in Sydney,<sup>75</sup> Reverend William Earnest Robertson had been sent from New York by Reverend McGuire to lay the groundwork for the creation of a church in Whitney Pier.<sup>76</sup> Almost all the interviewed members of the community noted that the request for a minister or a church arose because of the racism the people in Whitney Pier were experiencing at the time. Robertson remained in the Pier for almost a year, during which he dealt with obstruction from some of the community who were uninterested in the creation of a Black church. This obstruction included direct attacks on Reverend Robertson, his place of residence, and the temporary location of the new church.<sup>77</sup> Upon his departure in 1922, plans had been made for a new church, and Reverend Robertson was succeeded by Reverend Arthur Stanley Trotman as leader of the new St. Philips African Orthodox Church.<sup>78</sup> Trotman was truly a part of the community, a Barbadian steelworker who had left the community to study and was returning as their religious leader. In the first issue of the *Negro Churchman*, McGuire stated that the church had "extended its missions through several states, into Canada, Cuba, and Hayti." Bishop McGuire also reported that there were already "10 Priests, 4 Deacons, 2 Sub-deacons and several Deaconesses, Catechists and Seminarians in training."<sup>79</sup> St. Philip's had thus become another connection between this community and the broader diaspora.

In its beginning years, St. Philip's held its services first in St. Mark's Presbyterian Church on Henry Street, then in a building on Victoria Road, and next in a building on the corner of Lingan Road and Tupper Street, a location that appears to have been the home of then-minister Archpriest Philips.<sup>80</sup> In



1923, Bishop McGuire went on a pilgrimage to the churches in New England and then visited Sydney, Nova Scotia's St. Philip's African Orthodox Church. On 10 September 1924, Reverend Arthur Stanley Trotman was consecrated at the Church of the Good Shephard by Reverends McGuire and Robertson, becoming St. Philip's first bishop. Bishop Trotman remained there only a short while after his consecration and was succeeded by Archpriest Dixon Egbert Philips in December 1925. At this point, the congregation agreed to purchase land on Hankard Street from William Fitzgerald, then-mayor of Sydney, on which to erect a permanent church.<sup>81</sup> Payments were made to Fitzgerald by church trustees through the Royal Bank of Canada, and church records note the continued payments on the lot over the next few years.<sup>82</sup>

The building housing St. Philip's once stood "just inside gate number four" of the steel plant and had served as a storage shed. The building was sold to the St. Philip's congregation after Dr. Alvinus Calder, a Grenadian-born physician trained at Queen's University, and others approached the officials at the steel plant and negotiated its purchase.<sup>83</sup> As part of the agreement, the community had to arrange for the building to be moved from its location on the grounds of the steel company to the newly purchased lot. The membership, including then Reverend Philips, "put wooden rollers like poles on the tracks . . . and they literally hauled that building over the tracks to where it is present day. . . . Reverend Philips, he was up front and he had a big harness on his shoulders and he was pulling."<sup>84</sup> St. Philip's almost immediately became the heart of the community.

Many aspects of the social lives of the Caribbean community in Whitney Pier were centred on St. Philip's. Community members recall annual church picnics (e.g., their annual Dominion Day picnic) and pie socials. The church often went on excursions, sometimes venturing as far as New Campbellton or Louisbourg on the old lake boats. They would pack big baskets of food and make a day of it. The West Indian band and UNIA band would often play music on the boats as they travelled.<sup>85</sup> While little found in the church records speaks to the economic climate the community existed in, the transnational connections of the St. Philip's community allow some understanding of community needs to be drawn from the pages of the *Negro Churchman*. Through these pages, we gain insight into the ways the mother church worked to aid its member families, making use of its connections to congregations and parishioners throughout the diaspora. For example, in 1923–24, the following item was published in the *Negro Churchman*:

The Church building in which St. Philips congregation meets has been offered them [*sic*] for purchase and consideration is now being given to the matter. This would not be a difficult matter were it not for the local economic stagnation. One or two persons in New York having learnt of Bishop Trotman's need of actual supplies for the body have sent him and Mrs. Trotman donations. 'The worst is ahead' he writes. People are starving in Sydney. Any reader of the *Churchman* may send the Bishop a Dollar through us.<sup>86</sup>

Church congregations and individuals from New York to Massachusetts responded to this editorial plea.<sup>87</sup> At the end of the year, Bishop expressed his thanks to congregations in New York as well as in Massachusetts for having sent donations, enabling Christmas aid from the church for members of the community.<sup>88</sup> In the next issue, the *Negro Churchman* published a letter of gratitude from Bishop Trotman, again thanking all churches and persons who had helped St. Philip's in her time of need, and informed the readership that the steel plant was in the process of negotiating wages and starting two mills, employing five hundred men, while a few of the mines were working halftime.<sup>89</sup>

This was a difficult time throughout the Maritimes, with an economic decline that had started in 1920 ravaging various industries. Perhaps most relevant to the population under discussion, the Nova Scotia steel industry was barely surviving. Trying to survive in a tough economic climate, the British Empire Steel and Coal Corporation (BESCO) resulted from the merger of the two major steel and coal corporations in the province and Halifax Shipyards. The merger did not improve the lives of the workers as hoped, and labour conflict was constant during the period. The item noted in the *Churchman* in terms of labour negotiation and reduced work is just a small peek into the turmoil of the period in this region, as BESCO struggled to survive amid a drop in steel production, increased worker dissatisfaction, and an overall economic recession.<sup>90</sup> However, it does raise interesting questions as to the experiences Black industrial workers had during this period. Membership in this transnational group was clearly a benefit, providing a means of survival for this community within a struggling industrial community.

St. Philip's mirrored the UNIA in terms of its creation of new social spaces and places for support for these Caribbean immigrants and their families, and individuals holding membership or leadership positions in either organization often held membership in both. This has perhaps fueled the continued confusion about the

affiliation of the AOC and UNIA. However, both the role of raising race consciousness and the work toward the advancement of members of the Black community made them equally attractive in the context of racism and discrimination.

The networks within the African diaspora in the Americas have been extensive. The advent of improved travel by ship or train created even wider networks. The Black nationalist UNIA served to underscore the diasporic connections from one context to the next, while the *Negro World* highlighted similarities between communities and peoples. By travelling from their homelands to Sydney to work in the steel business, the members of the Whitney Pier Caribbean community had expanded this network of African diasporic peoples in the Americas.

In this chapter, I have explored the ways in which Black nationalist discourses of the early twentieth century impacted life in Whitney Pier by introducing the UNIA and AOC into the Black community. I examined the relationship between Garvey and McGuire and how they shaped the UNIA and AOC. Both organizations could be examined as they are on the surface: a church and a fraternal organization. However, what makes them worthy of discussion is how they connect this small Caribbean community in Nova Scotia to the broader Black nationalist movements of the early twentieth century. This connection outlines some of the ways in which both the UNIA and AOC worked to unite people across continents into singular notions of racial pride and community. Both movements were actively sought out by the Whitney Pier community, indicating the importance they attached to their racial identity and the racial politics of the period.

## Notes

1. The latter group made up the majority of the settlers in the small Black community and, for the most part, identified as “West Indian.” In fact, while migrants came from Barbados, the Bahamas, Brazil, Bermuda, Jamaica, Cuba, Grenada, St. Vincent, St. Kitts, British Guiana, and perhaps other islands, they are mostly remembered and referred to collectively as “Barbadian.”
2. Heron, *Working in Steel*.
3. See Marano, “For the Freedom”; Marano, “We All Used to Meet at the Hall,” 143–75; Marano, “Rise Strongly and Rapidly,” 233–59; and Toney, “Locating Diaspora,” 75–88.
4. For more on this, see Bertley, “Universal Negro Improvement Association”; Henry, *Emancipation Day*.

5. It is important to note that archival research on the UNIA often proves difficult, as few divisions have retained historical records for consultation.
6. Ewing, *Age of Garvey*, 4, 5.
7. “And Conservation” was removed from the title when it was incorporated in New York in 1918.
8. It was through the ACL that Garvey launched and ran many of the UNIA’s business ventures, such as the Black Star Line, the Negro Factories Corporation, and the journal *Negro World*. For more on this, see Robert Hill, *Marcus Garvey*, vols. 1–4; Hill and Bair, *Marcus Garvey, Life and Lessons*.
9. Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, x.
10. Cronon, *Black Moses*; Essien-Udom, “Introduction to the Second Edition.”
11. Bracey, Meier, and Rudwick, *Black Nationalism in America*; Dawson, *Behind the Mule*.
12. Brown and Shaw, “Separate Nations,” 22–44.
13. VanDeburg, *Modern Black Nationalism*, 11.
14. Hill, “General Introduction,” xxxvi.
15. Essien-Udom, “Introduction to the Second Edition.”
16. Opie, *Black Labor Migration*; Mathieu, *North of the Color Line*.
17. Essien-Udom says this number is a conservative estimate, as Garvey believed the organization had up to six million members at its height. Essien-Udom, “Introduction to the Second Edition.”
18. Martin, *Race First*, 35.
19. Marano has noted that UNIA Halls seemed to mainly exist in places where West Indians settled. See Marano, “Rise Strongly and Rapidly,” 233–59.
20. Marano, 233–59; James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, 84.
21. Beaton, “African-American Community in Cape Breton,” 65–97.
22. Elizabeth Beaton in conversation with the author. The question of when Black men were officially allowed to join the union is one that requires further exploration.
23. Hill, “Convention Reports,” 535.
24. “K,” General Warrant for Poll Tax, City of Sydney Charter.
25. Hill, “Convention Reports,” 646.
26. Submissions from the *Negro Churchman* also highlight the reality that the early 1920s were extremely difficult economically for the community. As Nova Scotia was in the midst of the collapse of its industrial economy, this should come as no surprise. For more on the state of labour and the economy in Nova Scotia in the 1920s, see Forbes, *Maritime Rights Movement*; Frank, “Cape Breton Coal Industry,” 3–34.

27. Walker, "Race and Recruitment," 1–26.
28. Walker, 5.
29. Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion*.
30. Quoted in Walker, "Race and Recruitment," 11.
31. Winks, *Blacks in Canada*.
32. Winks, 317.
33. Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion*; Walker, "Race and Recruitment," 1–26.
34. Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion*.
35. *Atlantic Advocate*, no. 7, January 1917, 1.
36. For more on the leadership of this unit, see Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion*; Walker, "Race and Recruitment," 1–26.
37. Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion*; Walker, "Race and Recruitment," 1–26.
38. Walker, "Race and Recruitment."
39. Walker, "Race and Recruitment," 24.
40. Whitfield Best, interviewed by Claudine Bonner, 2011, Sydney, NS; "Personnel Records of the First World War," RG 150, Accession 1992–93/166, box 701-26, item number 41949, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.
41. Mathieu, *North of the Color Line*.
42. Mathieu.
43. Weeks, *One God*, 37.
44. Marano, "Rise Strongly and Rapidly," 252.
45. United Negro Improvement Association, 78-112-1862, Beaton Institute, Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS.
46. Records of St. Philip's African Orthodox Church; Beaton, "Religious Affiliation and Ethnic Identity."
47. Clotilda Yakimchuk, in discussion with the author, Sydney, NS, 2011.
48. Weeks, *One God*.
49. Hill, "Convention Reports," 766.
50. Duncan, "Efficient Womanhood," 136.
51. Marano, "We All Used to Meet at the Hall."
52. Marano, "For the Freedom of the Black People."
53. Weeks, *One God*, 70.
54. "Easter Lavishly Celebrated by New Aberdeen, N.S., Div.," *Negro World*, 27 May 1922; *Negro World* 3 June 1933; "Glance Bay Notes," *Free Lance*, 29 June 1935.
55. "UNIA Reorganized," *Nova Scotia Gleaner* 1, no. 3 (1929).
56. While there were thirty-one financial members on the books in 1929, we have no way of knowing how many regular members there might have been. Marano, "We All Used to Meet at the Hall"; *Nova Scotia Gleaner*.
57. Beaton, "Religious Affiliation and Ethnic Identity."

58. Beryl Braitwaite, as quoted in Joan Weeks, *One God*, 70.
59. Braithwaite, "Woman's View," 84.
60. Beaton, "Religious Affiliation and Ethnic Identity."
61. Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 4–6.
62. Clearly indicating a desire for a Black church before ever encountering Garvey.
63. Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement*.
64. A statement in the *Negro World* goes on to outline the hope that the Church of the Good Shepherd would become the mother church of their congregation, which it suggests is already growing. Hill, "Convention Reports," 693–94; Pruter, *Strange Partnership*.
65. Marano, "For the Freedom of the Black People."
66. Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement*.
67. Burkett.
68. There remains confusion/controversy around this decision on the part of Villate. However, extended details of McGuire's journey to his consecration by Villate are beyond the scope of this chapter. For a more detailed telling, see Pruter, *Strange Partnership*; Terry-Thompson, *History of the African Orthodox Church*.
69. The name of the church had been agreed upon at a synod of the Independent Episcopal Church some weeks prior. Pruter, *Strange Partnership*; Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement*.
70. Or was forced to resign. Newman, "Origins of the African Orthodox Church."
71. Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement*.
72. Hill, *Marcus Garvey*, 292.
73. Some believe that the special relationship between the two men had caused rifts within the clergy inside the UNIA early on. Pruter, *Strange Partnership*; Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement*.
74. Marano, "For the Freedom of the Black People," 180.
75. There is no consensus on this origin story. Some say the AOC began at the community's request; others contend it came as a result of McGuire's proselytizing. In 1924 the *Negro Churchman* suggested that while Stanley Trotman was a lay reader, he built up such a large following that the church in New York took notice and sent them an ordained minister.
76. Robertson was McGuire's number two in this newly formed denomination and would go on to a long career in the church, succeeding McGuire as archbishop upon his death in 1934. Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement*.
77. Records of St. Philip's African Orthodox Church.

78. Francis, "History of the Black Population at Whitney Pier."
79. *Negro Churchman* 1 (March 1923): 1.
80. Records of St. Philip's African Orthodox Church. The *Negro Churchman* also notes that the church had taken over the Foresters Hall for their use, solely as a church from 1 June 1924.
81. Fitzgerald owned a large portion of the Pier. City of Sydney Annual Reports (Sydney, NS: Macadam, 1920); Beaton, "Religious Affiliation and Ethnic Identity."
82. Journal, 1926–1930, St. Phillips African Orthodox Church Records, MG 13, 75, acc. no. 80-61-1091, A.2, Beaton Institute, Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS.
83. Beaton, "Religious Affiliation and Ethnic Identity"; Reid, "Toolshed from Gate #4."
84. Whitfield Best, interviewed by Claudine Bonner, Sydney, NS, 2011.
85. Journal, 1926–1930, St. Phillips African Orthodox Church.
86. *Negro Churchman* 2 (1923–24): 9.
87. Highlighting the difference in economic climate being experienced in the Maritimes in this period as compared to the relative prosperity being experienced in the Northeastern United States.
88. "Parochial News Items," *Negro Churchman* 3 (1925): 1.
89. "Church News," *Negro Churchman* 3 (1925): 2.
90. For more on the economic crisis of the early to mid-1920s and its crushing impact on Cape Breton, see Forbes, *Maritime Rights Movement*; Frank, "Cape Breton Coal Industry."

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## 4 **An Invisible Minority** **Acadians in Industrial Cape Breton**

*Ronald Labelle*

Looking at Industrial Cape Breton today, one would never guess that Acadians were the first European settlers to take root in the area and that they once had an important presence in some of the districts that make up the present-day Cape Breton Regional Municipality. Why did their culture decline there while it thrived in other parts of the Maritimes? In order to answer this important question, it is necessary to review the three-hundred-year history of Acadian presence in the region, a history that encompasses four distinct periods.

The story begins in 1749, during the final years of the Île Royale colony, when hundreds of Acadian refugees from the British-occupied mainland founded the community of Baie-des-Espagnols, thus becoming the first European settlers in what is now Sydney. At that time, smaller groups of Acadians also settled at coastal locations like Mordienne (present-day Port Morien) and L'Indienne (present-day Lingan). These were short-lived settlements, as all the Acadians either fled the colony or were rounded up and deported to France when Louisbourg fell to the British in 1758, bringing the first period to a close.

Following a return to peace in 1763, some Acadians trickled back to the area by way of Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon. Over one thousand displaced Acadians had taken refuge on the French islands after the British conquest, and at least two hundred chose to return to British territory in 1767.<sup>1</sup> Members of the Lejeune family, who had first settled at Baie-des-Espagnols in 1749, obtained lands at Little Bras d'Or, and several of their relatives soon joined them.<sup>2</sup> During the following decades, dozens of Acadian families migrated

from Prince Edward Island (PEI) to Cape Breton and some obtained land grants at nearby Frenchvale. Most notably, three Gautreau brothers who had kinship ties to the Lejeune family made the voyage from PEI. Their descendants changed their family name first to Gouthro and finally to Guthro, while the name Lejeune was translated to Young, as descendants of the original Frenchvale and Little Bras d'Or settlers gradually adopted the English language.

The controversial French diplomat Arthur de Gobineau provided one nineteenth-century description of Frenchvale.<sup>3</sup> In 1861, he visited the community he called “le village français,” and in his book entitled *Voyage à Terre-Neuve*, he mentioned that the Acadian identity in Frenchvale was in the process of disappearing, as the descendants of Francophone settlers mixed in with the surrounding population.<sup>4</sup> In 1892, J. G. Bourinot published a study of Cape Breton history that included another description of Frenchvale. He stated that it had been a flourishing Acadian agricultural settlement until the young men left for the coal mines, while the women left to seek work in the United States. Bourinot described Little Bras d'Or as consisting of Acadians who had returned from Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon and who were later joined by families from Richmond County as well as by a number of refugees from the French Revolution.<sup>5</sup> The author commented, “English is now the prevalent tongue everywhere, save in a few Acadian families where a patois of English and French is still spoken.”<sup>6</sup>

At the dawn of the twentieth century, as the second era of Acadian presence in Eastern Cape Breton was coming to a close, historian Philéas-F. Bourgeois wrote a report on the status of the French language there. He presented it at the 1900 Convention nationale acadienne held in Arichat, where he observed that in Cape Breton County, the French language had disappeared from Louisbourg, Miré (Mira), Catalogne (Catalone), Lorambec (Lorraine), and Mainadieu, while the language was still spoken in Frenchvale.<sup>7</sup>

## Moving to Industrial Cape Breton

Like Cape Bretoners of Scottish origin who were attracted by work opportunities in the Boston area during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Acadians from Cape Breton and elsewhere were leaving in large numbers for the industrial towns of Massachusetts. Many Acadians from the Chéticamp area sought to escape their exploitation at the hands of fish

merchants by joining the emigration movement, settling in the Boston suburb of Cambridge, where they could find work in brickyards and other industries.<sup>8</sup> Others, however, preferred to remain closer to home. They took advantage of new work opportunities in the expanding coal industry. The dawn of the twentieth century saw a resurgence of the Acadian presence in Eastern Cape Breton, when the Dominion Coal Company opened large collieries in Glace Bay, Reserve Mines, Dominion, and what would become New Waterford. Some Acadians from Chéticamp briefly worked in the coal mines at Inverness, where two collieries opened in 1903, before making the move to the Glace Bay area. Other migrants had obtained work experience in the gypsum mine established in Chéticamp in 1907. It operated sporadically until it was abandoned in 1939.<sup>9</sup>

Canada census returns from 1901 and 1911 indicate that the subdistrict of Glace Bay, which included the future communities of Reserve Mines and Dominion, saw a massive influx of new residents in the first decade of the twentieth century. Among the 1,173 individuals living in the Glace Bay area listed as having a “French” origin in the 1911 census, many had migrated from Frenchvale or Little Bras d’Or, while at least 400 were Acadians newly arrived from Inverness County. In addition, Glace Bay was home to some coal miners of Belgian origin who lived in a section of the town known as the “French Block.”<sup>10</sup>

In Sydney, the steel plant established in 1899 does not seem to have initially attracted many Acadian workers. Of the 3,231 employees named in the records for the years 1900–1910, no more than a few dozen are likely to have been Acadian.<sup>11</sup> However, not all Acadian migrants were seeking employment in steel or coal, as many skilled carpenters moved to the Sydney and Glace Bay areas to take part in the construction boom that accompanied industrialization. Their presence in the region explains why a hipped roof form developed earlier in the Chéticamp area in order to prevent damage from “suète” winds of one hundred kilometres per hour or more became a common architectural feature in homes all over the area. Other Acadian migrants were skilled in various trades, such as blacksmithing.<sup>12</sup>

Much of the available information about early twentieth-century migrations from the Chéticamp area to Industrial Cape Breton is contained in a collection of oral interviews carried out by the author between 2013 and 2019. Informal open-ended interviews were conducted during that period with members of the Acadian minority population living in New Waterford and

Sydney.<sup>13</sup> The interviews paint a picture of a time when migrants were attracted to the area by a diversity of employment opportunities. While men generally moved to Industrial Cape Breton to work as miners or tradesmen, many young women from Chéticamp joined the migratory movement, seeking employment as domestics in private homes.

Joseph Jean Chiasson, born in 1893 in Saint-Joseph-du-Moine, Inverness County, is one of the rare Acadian migrants to have produced written memoirs. In a French-language entry dated April 29, 1943, he recalls his move to Glace Bay in early 1901:

As there were a number of neighbours going to the mines in the area of Glace Bay I decided to undertake the trip. I could hardly speak English. Arriving in Caledonia Mines it was very difficult to get work on the surface. If it had not been that my sister Évangéline was in service at the manager's home, it would have been impossible. In the month of August, as several of my friends were in the mines, I decided to join them in order to make more money. The autumn was very dry, which made the water very unhealthy and all our Acadians, 22 in number, fell sick with the fever.<sup>14</sup>

This quote provides a glimpse into a work environment where a French-speaking Acadian had few employment prospects unless an intermediary could act on his behalf. Chiasson eventually settled in New Waterford, where he raised his family and was active in local organizations.<sup>15</sup> As the coal industry expanded during the first decade of the twentieth century, the migratory movement quickly increased. One notable individual who moved from Chéticamp to Glace Bay was Jean Deveaux, a coal miner who settled with his wife in the Passchendaele district of Glace Bay in 1910. He had learned many Acadian folktales during his youth in Chéticamp, and thanks to the work of Gérard Aucoin, instructor at Xavier Junior College, his tales were collected and published posthumously in 1980 by the Canadian Museum of Man (now Museum of Canadian History) under the title *Loiseau de la vérité*.<sup>16</sup>

## An Acadian Community in New Waterford

The largest population increase in the New Waterford area happened during the second decade of the twentieth century. The community was just beginning to take shape when Acadian migrants arrived to seek work either

at the Dominion No. 12 Colliery, opened in 1908, or at one of four others opened between 1909 and 1914.<sup>17</sup> Why did they choose New Waterford over the other coal towns in Industrial Cape Breton? One reason may be that it was a new town where they could have a better opportunity to express their culture. Some informants stated that the Acadians who settled in New Waterford encountered less anti-French prejudice than in Reserve Mines, in particular. In a 1984 interview, Hubert Muise, whose parents had moved from Chéticamp to Reserve Mines in 1907 before relocating to New Waterford in 1914, recounted that in the former town, conditions were difficult for French-speaking people who had to endure the resentment of many English-speaking residents.<sup>18</sup>

Richard Chiasson's grandfather had a similar experience, moving to Reserve Mines at the beginning of the twentieth century and later settling permanently in New Waterford. Having previously been a farmer, he maintained a small herd of dairy cows in New Waterford and raised hogs and chickens.<sup>19</sup> Several informants mentioned that by producing much of their own food, Acadians in New Waterford were able to cope well during labour disputes in the mines. Being partly self-sufficient may have empowered them at times when strike action was required.

With the rapid influx of Acadians and other Roman Catholics in the New Waterford area, a hall was built in 1907 to hold church services. The parish of Mount Carmel was established five years later, and many of the newly arriving Acadians chose to live in the eastern section of the community, close to the new church. Joe Aucoin told of how his father dismantled his house in Chéticamp and moved it to New Waterford, reassembling it on a small lot situated between two houses occupied by Acadian families.<sup>20</sup> Part of the reason for the clustering of Acadians was the fact that they were able to support each other in times of need. Joseph Muise, for example, stated that when an Acadian family began building a home, ten or twelve men would gather to make a cement foundation, and the day would end with a *fricot*, a traditional chicken-based stew, accompanied by baked beans and homemade bread.<sup>21</sup>

In New Waterford, there were various options available for Acadians who did not want to work underground. Some sought construction work or combined various occupations with small farming, while others opened corner grocery stores where the local population could be served in French. Nevertheless, many Acadians were attracted to work opportunities in "the pit," and Joseph Muise, a miner from 1946 to 1968, remembered that during those years,

there could be as many as fifty French-speaking men working along the same wall underground.<sup>22</sup> The fact that no informant mentioned ethnic or language conflicts underground suggests that a degree of solidarity existed among the men who laboured under similar work conditions.

## Acadians Become Organized (1905–13)

Acadians in Industrial Cape Breton needed to mobilize in order to create the social cohesion necessary to maintain their identity. They quickly rallied around the banner of the new Société l'Assomption, a fraternal benefit society founded in 1903 by Acadians living in Waltham, Massachusetts, and relocated to Moncton, New Brunswick, ten years later. One of the main activities of the Société l'Assomption was to offer scholarships to Acadian students; it also provided its members with insurance services.<sup>23</sup> Over two hundred local chapters of the Société l'Assomption were founded in the Maritimes and New England between 1903 and 1933. Three of the earliest ones were in Industrial Cape Breton: the G.-M. LeBlanc chapter established in Glace Bay in 1905, the Bras d'Or chapter in Sydney in 1906, and the Père Fiset chapter in Reserve Mines in 1907. Eventually, nine other chapters were created in the Acadian districts of Inverness and Richmond Counties.<sup>24</sup>

Although the Acadian community in the Sydney area would struggle to maintain its cohesion throughout the twentieth century, there was much optimism surrounding the early years of the Société l'Assomption. At the 1910 annual meeting of the chapter located in the Whitney Pier district of Sydney, Secretary Jean H. LeBlanc spoke about the means that were necessary in order to preserve the language and religious faith inherited from Acadian ancestors: “Des moyens qu'on doit employer pour conserver intactes notre foi et la belle langue de nos aïeux.”<sup>25</sup> Acadians in Whitney Pier were members of Holy Redeemer Roman Catholic parish where a Francophone assistant priest provided French-language services.<sup>26</sup> That same year, a delegate from Glace Bay was the first to represent Industrial Cape Breton at the Société l'Assomption's annual convention held at Church Point, Nova Scotia.<sup>27</sup>

At numerous meetings and gatherings, speakers not only exhorted members to preserve their language and their religious faith but also weighed in on social and political issues. For example, at the 1914 annual meeting of the Glace Bay chapter, *conseiller-général* A. J. Doucet encouraged members to give to the scholarship fund, saying it was one of the best ways to combat the



enemies that threatened Acadian society: socialism and anti-Catholic organizations: “Un des meilleurs moyens de combattre l’ennemi qui nous entoure: le socialisme et les sociétés ennemies de l’Église.”<sup>28</sup> The Roman Catholic Church played a predominant role in the Assomption movement, hence the insistence on opposing socialist or communist tendencies.

Each local chapter chose a name with either religious or patriotic connotations. The fact that the Reserve Mines branch was named after Father Fiset shows the strong ties that existed between the Acadian coal mining families and their home community of Chéticamp: Father Pierre Fiset was parish priest at Chéticamp from 1875 until his death in 1909 and played an important role in the construction of the massive stone church there in 1892–93.<sup>29</sup> Bilingual parish priest Ronald MacDonald was sympathetic to the Acadian cause and served on the board of the Reserve Mines chapter of the Société l’Assomption as “directeur-spirituel” between 1906 and 1911.<sup>30</sup>

Although French-language culture had a brief presence in early twentieth-century Reserve Mines, the Société l’Assomption was very active in the community at that time. In 1911, the society’s members founded a French-language drama group named *La petite Soeur* and presented an evening of original plays at the King’s Theatre in Glace Bay. They seem to have reached out to non-Acadians as well, as a report on the event mentions the attendance of Italians, Belgians, and English-speaking residents: “Français, Anglais, Italiens et Belges, tous s’y étaient rendus pour nous encourager et applaudir à nos succès.”<sup>31</sup> While many residents of Belgian origin spoke French, there seems to have been little contact between them and the Acadians in the area, as we found no other examples of interaction between the two groups.

Newly arrived Acadians in New Waterford founded the Saint-Grégoire chapter of the Société l’Assomption on 5 September 1910, three years before the town’s incorporation.<sup>32</sup> While the society was an all-male organization at the outset, women’s chapters came into existence beginning in 1912. By the following year, Glace Bay, Reserve Mines, Sydney, and New Waterford all had established women’s chapters. These were the first women’s chapters founded in all of Nova Scotia, an illustration of the way the local population was well connected to the wider Acadian diaspora.<sup>33</sup>

On 15 August 1912, a rare event brought together members of all four local chapters of the Société l’Assomption. On the feast day of Notre-Dame-de-l’Assomption, patron saint of Acadians, a train excursion brought them on a pilgrimage to the historic site of Louisbourg.<sup>34</sup> It was customary for the Société

l'Assomption to organize community picnics on the Feast of the Assumption each year, but the 1912 celebration was an especially elaborate event that united Acadians from all over Industrial Cape Breton.

In their ongoing activities, members of Acadian organizations continuously tried to strike a balance between lobbying for local causes and participating in collective actions. In 1922, for example, Société l'Assomption members in Industrial Cape Breton joined with Acadians everywhere in contributing funds for the construction of the commemorative church at the historic site of Grand-Pré, Nova Scotia.<sup>35</sup>

## The French Language in New Waterford (1918–50)

French-language education was always a priority for the Société l'Assomption. Beginning in 1912, six students from Industrial Cape Breton received scholarships to pursue their education in French, including three young women who went to study at the convent administered by the *Filles de Jésus* congregation in Chéticamp during the 1920s.<sup>36</sup> Apart from offering scholarships to Acadian students, the society also contributed generously to Mount Carmel parish church.<sup>37</sup>

In New Waterford, the first Mount Carmel School opened in 1912 with approximately two hundred pupils, and the question of including French-language education there was first raised at a school board meeting in 1917.<sup>38</sup> The following year, a committee representing French-speaking parents again addressed the board, as revealed in the minutes of the 8 March 1918 meeting:

Mr. R. F. Bourque addressed the Board and said that they would like very well if the Board would consider with favor the advisability of starting a French class in the schools. He said that a considerable number of children were going out of town each year to study French in other schools and by having a French class in the schools of the town the parents of these children would be saved the trouble and expense of sending their children away.<sup>39</sup>

The board agreed in principle that a room could be set aside for the teaching of French up to the fifth grade. However, the first formal French class did not begin at Mount Carmel until the Sisters of Charity took over the school's administration in 1921.<sup>40</sup> In the meantime, members of the Société l'Assomption obtained teaching materials and offered children two French classes a week in their newly opened hall.<sup>41</sup>

The provisions to offer French-language instruction in New Waterford were inadequate from the start, as a large number of Francophone children were crowded into a single classroom. Acadian families were to experience constant frustration over the following years, as the local school board repeatedly refused requests to expand the French-language program. In July of 1923, for example, a delegation from the New Waterford chapter of the Société l'Assomption attempted unsuccessfully to secure the appointment of a second teacher, as ninety pupils were expected to enrol during the coming year.<sup>42</sup>

Overcrowding in the French class at Mount Carmel School often led to the resignation of the teacher in charge, forcing the board to scramble to find a replacement.<sup>43</sup> Several members of the Sisters of Charity were Acadian nuns, and they eventually took over teaching duties. This brought more stability to the French class, though the problem of overcrowding remained. Finally, in 1948, Francophone pupils at Mount Carmel School were placed into two separate classes, one for grades 1 to 3, and the other for grades 4 to 6. Despite this change, many Acadian parents saw the French program as a dead end. Being obliged to pursue their studies in English beginning in grade 7, Acadian students never became fully competent in their first language and could not aspire to go on to higher education in French.

One strategy New Waterford parents used to transmit language skills was to send their children to spend summer holidays with relatives in Chéticamp. The attachment of New Waterford Acadians to their home community of Chéticamp is best expressed by Richard Chiasson, born in New Waterford in 1949: "Acadians who were born in New Waterford or who were brought up in New Waterford, their heart is still in Chéticamp" ("Les Acadiens qui sont nés à New Waterford, qui ont été élevés à New Waterford, leur coeur est encore à Chéticamp").<sup>44</sup> Chiasson, a former teacher, explained language assimilation this way:

The parents who came from Chéticamp can be classified in three groups. There were those who spoke to their children in French and wanted them to answer in French. Other parents from Chéticamp spoke to their children in French but let them answer in English. Then there is the third group, those who would switch to English when their kids started answering them in English. And those children ended up losing their language.<sup>45</sup>

Migration patterns saw Acadians leave rural communities for both Industrial Cape Breton and towns in the United States around the turn of the twentieth century, and a triangular network of contacts was established between Chéticamp, New Waterford, and the Boston area, where the town of Waltham had become the main New England destination for Acadian migrants. Those who moved to Massachusetts often returned to Chéticamp to visit relatives during the summer, and New Waterford Acadians made sure their visits to the home community coincided with the arrivals from New England.<sup>46</sup>

Given the attachment of Acadians in Industrial Cape Breton to their roots in Chéticamp, it is not surprising that many of them chose to relocate there in retirement. The decision to leave their adopted home was not always an easy one. Interestingly, several informants mentioned that the men were usually those who felt drawn back to Chéticamp for their retirement years, while their wives would have preferred to remain in Sydney or New Waterford.<sup>47</sup>

## Acadian Resilience in the Mid-twentieth Century

In the midcentury, at a time when Acadian organizations in the Maritimes were in general decline, the New Waterford branches of the Société l'Assomption remained active, raising money to help needy families at times of illness and awarding prizes to pupils enrolled in French classes. The men's and women's chapters worked together to organize dinners, dances, and musical evenings and celebrate yearly festivities marking both La Chandeleur, the traditional Acadian Candlemas celebration held on February 2, and Mardi Gras, the feast preceding the beginning of Lent.<sup>48</sup>

They also marked the August 15 patriotic holiday each year with a procession including an image of Our Lady of Assumption, accompanied by a large banner representing the Société l'Assomption, as well as a costumed Évangéline.<sup>49</sup> Although Évangéline was a fictional heroine created by American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow,<sup>50</sup> the character had become a powerful symbol of Acadian identity not only in the Maritimes, where a statue of Évangéline was the centrepiece at the Grand-Pré commemorative site, but also in Louisiana and in New England.<sup>51</sup>

In the early 1960s, local leader Joseph Boudreau was closely involved in plans to create a new Acadian social organization in New Waterford. At that time, the board of the Société l'Assomption hoped an organization focused on social activities would attract more young members.<sup>52</sup> In October 1962, the

name “Cercle Évangéline” was chosen to represent the new organization. The following year, the Acadian community took part in the fiftieth-anniversary celebrations of the town of New Waterford. These included an Acadian Day, where a *fricot* dinner was served at the Salle l’Assomption.<sup>53</sup> The hall in New Waterford was renovated in 1964, and at the time of its reopening, the *Cape Breton Post* highlighted some of the activities of the organization: “Over the years the organization has contributed to the preservation of French hymns and songs by sponsoring choral and dance groups. A scholarship program has been an important part of the society’s work and numerous residents of Acadian descent have been aided in securing a higher education through support of the Assumption Society.”<sup>54</sup>

During the 1960s and 1970s, there were occasions when controversial issues were raised at meetings of the Cercle Évangéline. In February 1963, for example, a discussion dealt with efforts undertaken since the 1950s to convince the Diocese of Antigonish to create a French-language parish in New Waterford. A committee had brought up the matter with Msgr. William Power, who promised to study the question and provide a speedy response.<sup>55</sup> Joseph Boudreau recalled in 1989 that the committee heard nothing but empty promises from the bishop and finally gave up the campaign at the end of 1965. At that time, the diocese effectively put an end to the debate by deciding to enlarge the overcrowded Mount Carmel church rather than subdividing the parish.<sup>56</sup>

Acadians in Cape Breton eventually felt a need to have their own organization, one that would concentrate on causes rooted on the island, and so the Société Saint-Pierre was born in 1947. This organization, though based in Chéticamp, has included board members from both New Waterford and Sydney and one of its most active local participants was steel plant worker Tassien Boudreau, who arranged the entry of an Acadian-themed float in the parade marking Sydney’s 175th anniversary in 1960.<sup>57</sup> The float included a large illustration of Notre-Dame-de-l’Assomption as well as a costumed participant representing Évangéline.<sup>58</sup>

Activists like Tassien Boudreau faced great odds in their fight to resist the tide of language assimilation. In 1950, the Société l’Assomption appointed Henri P. LeBlanc of Moncton to carry out a survey of Nova Scotian Acadian communities.<sup>59</sup> His report painted a very pessimistic picture of the situation. In Reserve Mines, the author stated that the Acadian minority was rapidly becoming anglicized, while in Sydney, at least 75 percent of the town’s Acadians had stopped speaking French. LeBlanc added that even in families where both

parents were Acadian, children were losing the language.<sup>60</sup> The majority of the town's Acadians had little opportunity to use their first language, although a number of French-speaking families lived in the Shipyard neighbourhood of Sydney, where they sometimes gathered informally.<sup>61</sup>

In the mid-twentieth century, the Acadian nationalist movement was closely tied to the Roman Catholic Church, and the report produced in 1950 deplored the lack of a French-language Catholic parish in the area. It mentioned that there were currently no Francophone priests in any parish in Cape Breton County, despite the fact Little Bras d'Or, Sydney, Glace Bay, and New Waterford were each home to over one thousand French Catholics. In the latter community, Henri P. LeBlanc estimated that Acadians made up a majority of the members of Mount Carmel parish.<sup>62</sup> LeBlanc established a parallel between the Acadian and Italian minorities in Sydney, both communities being made up of working-class families that, in his opinion, would not have the financial means to support their own parish. This remark shows how Acadians and other working-class minority groups faced similar difficulties.

As in New Waterford, where the Cercle Évangéline was established so that francophones could continue to gather after the closure of the Société l'Assomption's local branches, members of the Sydney branch founded the Club Champlain in 1959. While the Société l'Assomption had met in Whitney Pier during its early decades, the Club Champlain chose to situate its hall on Ferry Road, closer to Sydney's downtown core. Unlike in New Waterford, there was no option available for French-language schooling in Sydney, and so in addition to hosting events to mark Acadian holidays, the Club Champlain offered Saturday afternoon French classes taught by volunteers. Despite the good intentions of organizers, language classes and Acadian events had a brief existence at the Club Champlain, and the hall was handed over to private ownership in 1974, simply becoming known as the "French Club," with little to distinguish it from other social gathering places.<sup>63</sup>

While Acadian organizations in Sydney itself were led by a handful of dedicated individuals who had little public support, New Waterford Acadians were better connected to their community. For example, in 1958, the men's and women's branches of the Société l'Assomption joined with the local chapter of the Knights of Columbus in a lobbying effort, asking that a proposed new hospital be managed by Roman Catholic nuns.<sup>64</sup>

The pastor of Mount Carmel parish at that time was a prominent Acadian, Msgr. Georges Landry. Originally from Isle Madame, he had served as bishop

of the Diocese of Hearst in Northern Ontario but was demoted after having supported the progressive archbishop of Montreal, Msgr. Joseph Charbonneau, in his unsuccessful defence of striking asbestos workers in 1949, a major conflict that pitted the Quebec labour movement against Maurice Duplessis's provincial government.<sup>65</sup> When the strike movement was crushed, Charbonneau and his allies were gradually ousted from positions of authority in the church, and Msgr. Landry returned to Cape Breton, where he was active in the Société l'Assomption and the Société Saint-Pierre. When he became pastor at Mount Carmel in 1957, the position had never been held by a French-speaking priest, although a bilingual priest had sometimes served as assistant.<sup>66</sup>

The activities of the Société l'Assomption sometimes went beyond matters related to French-language services and Acadian culture. For example, at the annual regional meeting held in 1961, an alarm was raised about the recent layoff of 120 employees by the Dominion Steel Corporation, and the executive was asked to look for ways of supporting the workers.<sup>67</sup> As leaders in the society's local branches were often involved in trade unions and the co-op movement, whenever pressing issues needed to be resolved, Acadian members could rely on networks of support reaching beyond the Société l'Assomption itself.

In 1955, the annual Feast of the Assumption took on added importance in New Waterford because of commemorations marking the two-hundredth anniversary of the Acadian Deportation. Mount Carmel parishioners organized a pageant that included a salute to the Acadian flag, a speech by former New Waterford mayor Patrick Muise, and two plays put on in French by local residents, the first being an original work inspired by the tragic history of Acadia and the second being directly based on H. W. Longfellow's classic poem, *Évangéline*.<sup>68</sup>

Among the eight local chapters of the Société l'Assomption that continued to function on Cape Breton Island during the mid-twentieth century, five were in Industrial Cape Breton, and by the 1960s, New Waterford had the only active women's chapter in all of eastern Nova Scotia.<sup>69</sup> When the society closed its local branches to give way to new provincial Acadian organizations in 1967, the New Waterford chapter simply transferred its assets to the Cercle Évangéline.<sup>70</sup>

## A Rapid Decline in the 1960s and 1970s

Beginning in January 1968, a major change happened in the running of the Cercle Évangéline's affairs. While all records pertaining to both the Société l'Assomption and the Cercle Évangéline had previously been written entirely in French, English gradually came into use, indicating that even members of the local population who were committed to the promotion of Acadian culture were becoming anglicized.

In the late 1960s and into the 1970s, the Cercle Évangéline was making heroic efforts to save what was left of Acadian culture in an increasingly anglicized community. It continued to fund the Société Saint-Pierre's charitable causes and sent representatives to provincial meetings of the new Fédération des Acadiens de la Nouvelle-Écosse (FANE), founded in 1968. It also tried to save what was left of French education in New Waterford by contributing financially to a pilot project in French at Mount Carmel School in 1971.<sup>71</sup> By the 1980s, the Cercle Évangéline was usually referred to in English as the "French Club," but its activities had little to do with language and culture. The organization continued to function simply as a Roman Catholic community organization before finally becoming moribund.<sup>72</sup>

While the FANE initially showed little interest in Industrial Cape Breton, the Nova Scotia government included the region in its Tribunal on Bilingual Higher Education that toured the province in 1969, hearing briefs from interested parties. Two briefs were submitted by Acadians from Sydney, while three came from New Waterford. Members of the Cercle Évangéline began their brief by stating that they were French Acadians in their heart and soul and that they would remain so until they died: "Acadiens français nous le sommes de coeur et d'âme: Nous le serons et nous espérons y mourir."<sup>73</sup> Joseph Boudreau presented a brief in his own name, recounting his inability to ensure that his children become truly bilingual because of a lack of educational opportunities. In his judgment, the tribunal had arrived twenty-five years too late.<sup>74</sup> Finally, the one submitted by Sister Ermine d'Entremont of New Waterford explained that adults in the community remained attached to their French culture but that young people preferred to mix with their English-speaking neighbours out of fear of being accused of forming a "ghetto."<sup>75</sup>

In 1969, the federal government adopted the Official Languages Act, giving the French language equal footing with English, and two years later, the Canadian secretary of state began a program of financial assistance for educational



institutions serving members of official language minority groups.<sup>76</sup> Ironically, this happened at the exact time when the French program that had existed for fifty years at Mount Carmel School was being abolished, the Acadian population in New Waterford having become anglicized to the point where it was no longer viable.<sup>77</sup>

In 1972, the FANE helped carry out a survey among families of French origin in Sydney and New Waterford. Many of the 342 respondents told of how they had been pressured to hide their Acadian identity in order to be accepted by the Anglophone population. Some stressed the necessity to speak English at workplaces such as the Sydney Steel Plant as the main reason for their failure to retain the French language. One striking example of the pressure to assimilate was provided by an Acadian by the name of Lelièvre, who recounted his first day at school in Glace Bay, when his teacher informed him that his name would henceforth be “Rabbit” (the word *lièvre* being French for *hare*). Upon his return home, the boy’s mother reacted angrily to the news and insisted that her son’s name not be translated into English.<sup>78</sup>

By 1972, many Acadians had simply accepted to blend into their English-speaking environment, to the point where some individuals who had a French-language upbringing pretended never to have spoken the language.<sup>79</sup> In many cases, Acadians who had suffered discrimination because of their French accent chose to raise their children in English so they would not be subjected to the same abuse as their parents. Some parents were even directly pressured by school officials to abandon their language. In one example, the parents of a child who was experiencing learning difficulties were told by school administrators in Sydney to stop speaking French to their children at home. Living in such a toxic environment, many children grew up in the 1950s and 1960s with a stigma associated with the French language and never acquired the ability to communicate in their mother tongue.<sup>80</sup>

The scars caused by discrimination have had lasting effects on many individuals, and the harm done to Acadians by schools in Industrial Cape Breton has never been acknowledged. Even today, Acadians in Industrial Cape Breton hesitate to discuss language discrimination, as in the following quote: “You made sure that you didn’t have a French accent. That was kind of like . . . you didn’t want to be . . . you know. . . . So that was one of the things too, that was strong. Although you didn’t . . . I don’t remember being shunned or anything because you were Acadian.”<sup>81</sup>

## A New Awakening in the 1980s

A new era began for Acadians in Industrial Cape Breton in the 1980s. Until then, efforts to promote the French language had been led by members of Acadian community organizations, but new allies were arriving on the scene with the expansion of French instruction at the University College of Cape Breton (UCCB) and at the Canadian Coast Guard College. The decentralization of federal government departments also brought more francophones to the Sydney area.<sup>82</sup> While working-class Acadians from the Chéticamp-Margaree area had dominated the French-speaking community in Industrial Cape Breton since the beginning of the twentieth century, many newly arrived francophones were highly educated professionals who were keen on obtaining French-language educational services.

The first sign of a reawakening of French culture in Industrial Cape Breton was the establishment of a cultural organization called *En français* by UCCB professors in 1980. The club organized Acadian musical evenings at the Cedars Club in Sydney as well as French-language events on the UCCB campus. It helped make French culture visible by participating in UCCB theatre festivals and in the 1985 Sydney Bicentennial.<sup>83</sup>

Local francophones were encouraged in 1981 when the province of Nova Scotia adopted Bill No. 65, stating that public funds would be made available for instruction to be carried out in the French language “in a school section in which there is a sufficient number of children whose first language learned and still understood is French.”<sup>84</sup> Interested parents began to organize, and in 1983, the creation of the Committee for French Education (Comité pour l'éducation française) formalized the process, with Dr. Laurent Lavoie as president. In January 1984, this group held public meetings in Sydney, Reserve Mines, Glace Bay, and New Waterford.

Much of the discussion on the topic of French education was centred on the merits of French immersion programs. An early French immersion program established by the provincial education department as a pilot project at Woodill School in Sydney in 1978 faced resistance from some of the teachers who shared the school.<sup>85</sup> Several members of the local school board also expressed their opposition to the program. As a result, at a time when early immersion programs were being established in school districts all around the province, the Cape Breton School Board decided to go in the opposite direction. The Sydney area eventually became the only one in the province

where no French immersion program was offered before grade 7, a situation that has continued to the present day.

In the 1980s, many Acadian parents in the Sydney area thought the best plan of action would be to lobby for a comprehensive French immersion program, believing it was unrealistic to ask for the creation of an entirely French school. Nevertheless, members of the Committee for French Education argued in favour of the French school option, believing that students could only truly become fluent in the language if they studied in a French-speaking environment. In early 1984, the committee hired a researcher who carried out an “Acadian school study,” canvassing francophone families everywhere in Industrial Cape Breton. When the results were tabulated, the committee came to a figure of 666 families whose children could be eligible for minority-language education rights.<sup>86</sup>

In October of 1984, the Committee for French Education presented the Cape Breton District School Board with a seventy-five-page brief outlining in detail the need for a French-language school. School board representatives refused to act on the report, and committee members then began to explore the possibility of taking legal action.<sup>87</sup> The following year, the school board carried out a preliminary survey of its own.<sup>88</sup> It sponsored a newspaper advertisement in April 1986 asking parents who were in favour of enrolling their children in a French school to call its offices in order to have their eligibility verified through an interview before school board officials. Given the intimidating aspect of the process, the response was predictably low, with only ninety-seven children being judged eligible. Based on those results, the board tabled the question.<sup>89</sup> This led the *Cape Breton Post* to publish an editorial criticizing the school board for “treating the parents group with neglect, if not outright disdain, rather than cooperation.”<sup>90</sup>

The Committee for French Education finally began formal court proceedings in December 1986, asking not only for the establishment of an Acadian school in the Sydney area but also for the creation of a separate school board for the province’s French schools.<sup>91</sup> The matter was becoming politically charged, as both provincial opposition Liberal leader Vince MacLean and New Democratic Party (NDP) leader Alexa McDonough spoke out in favour of the campaign.<sup>92</sup> Given the questionable results of the survey carried out by the school board in 1986, the provincial education minister hired Dr. Brian Joseph, sociology professor at UCCB, to complete a new independent study.<sup>93</sup> Results made public in April 1987 showed that 430 children in the Sydney area

would, in effect, qualify for French-language instruction. As the school board once again refused to act, the Committee for French Education sought an injunction from the Nova Scotia Supreme Court in order to resolve the matter. The committee now had a strong legal argument with which to challenge the board, given that minority-language rights were enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Finally, in February 1988, Justice Doane Hallett ordered the Cape Breton District School Board to begin offering French-language instruction from grades primary to 8 beginning in September.<sup>94</sup>

The next hurdle to overcome involved the choice of a suitable location for the school. The school board proposed using a section of the underutilized Breton Education Centre in New Waterford. This location was strongly opposed by the Committee for French Education, who argued that most of the pupils would have to travel twenty kilometres to attend the school.<sup>95</sup> The fact that the proposal to situate the school in New Waterford met with little local support shows the extent to which the Acadian community there had declined. After fighting for French-language education for half a century, from 1918 until the late 1960s, the Acadians of New Waterford finally abandoned the cause. Twenty years later, when the opportunity to achieve their long-time goal finally arose, it was simply too late, as the French language had all but disappeared in the community.

The province's Supreme Court was again called upon to resolve the dispute, and when in March 1988, Justice Hallett instructed school board officials to find a site other than New Waterford for the new school, the Cape Breton District School Board once again appealed the decision.<sup>96</sup> The extraordinary measures taken by the board to prevent access to French-language instruction in the Sydney area were unprecedented anywhere in Canada, and the conflict then began to attract the attention of the national media. Nowhere else in the country had a school board fought so adamantly against the provisions of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms regarding minority-language education.

In April 1988, the school board ruled that the cost of renovating a school building in Sydney would be prohibitive. This led the Committee for French Education to undertake contempt-of-court proceedings. The province then stepped in to settle the matter by offering to cover the renovation costs for a school on Mira Road on the outskirts of Sydney.<sup>97</sup> Having no choice but to accept this offer, the board put up one final hurdle, setting up a last-minute registration process and questioning whether the school would have enough

pupils to open. The tardiness of the planning process made it virtually impossible for a new school to be ready within weeks, and the board obtained the right to put a halt to the project, arguing that the number of pupils was insufficient.<sup>98</sup>

After repeatedly opposing requests for a French-language school, the Cape Breton District School Board then sought a legal argument to put an end to the process. By that time, national attention was being centred on the dispute and francophone minorities throughout the country were interested in the outcome. A *Globe and Mail* editorial entitled “A School for Sydney” was published on September 2. It concluded with the following: “The importance of this school goes far beyond 50 pupils. It has great significance for the community as a whole, a recognition that the language of the Acadians has a working future in the province. Education Minister Ronald Giffin and the Cape Breton board should give the Sydney school the green light.”<sup>99</sup>

The Committee for French Education appealed the decision not to go ahead with the school project and won a unanimous verdict from the Nova Scotia Supreme Court Appeal Division on 30 March 1989. The Sydney-based Committee for French Education had successfully taken on not only the regional school board but also the provincial government. They had also convinced many skeptical Acadian families that the time had finally come for French-language education in their community.<sup>100</sup>

Being forced to act upon the decision quickly, school board officials made space available in Cornwallis School in Sydney for French instruction from the primary level to grade 8. Such was their reluctance to permit the establishment of French instruction that the school board neglected to offer employment contracts to the three new teachers hired for the program, and the process was only completed the day before the beginning of classes in September 1989, following an urgent reminder from the coordinator of the French program.<sup>101</sup>

Despite its humble beginnings, the establishment of a French education program at Cornwallis School marked a victory for francophone families, but it was only one step in the long fight for minority-language rights. In other areas in the Maritimes, francophones were provided with new schools for their children and enrolments grew quickly.<sup>102</sup> In Sydney, however, the process was slowed down by the fact that families had to make do with temporary facilities until enrolments warranted the construction of an independent school.

## Laying the Foundation for a New Acadian Community (1990– )

With support from the FANE, parents began a new campaign in 1991, seeking to obtain an entirely French school that would have the visibility necessary to attract francophones from the entire Sydney area. Their request included the addition of a community centre, inspired by a model first developed in Fredericton, New Brunswick, that brought French-language education and francophone community services together under the same roof.<sup>103</sup>

At the same time as parents were lobbying for the construction of a new school and community centre, they were able to establish a direct line of communication between Cornwallis School and provincial education officials. On a national level, they provided an example of how francophones living in minority areas could obtain a level of control over their schools. It was in part thanks to their efforts that in 1996, the provincial government agreed to put all French schools under the umbrella of a new French-language school board, the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP). The plan included a gradual transition from Nova Scotia's bilingual "Acadian" school program to an entirely French-language system.<sup>104</sup>

That same year, French classes were moved from Cornwallis School to a former vocational school in downtown Sydney. Plans were made for the expansion and renovation of the building, and the Centre scolaire communautaire Étoile de l'Acadie was officially opened in April 1999 by Sheila Copps, minister of Canadian heritage. At the official opening of the new facility, Nova Scotia Education and Culture Minister Wayne Gaudet declared, "This event will be remembered as a great day for the Acadian community in Industrial Cape Breton. The opening of the Centre scolaire communautaire Étoile de l'Acadie will help ensure the Acadian star continues to shine in Cape Breton."<sup>105</sup>

The school was planned to accommodate approximately 150 pupils from grades primary to 12, with room for expansion. Over the years, the number of pupils has constantly increased, reaching a total of three hundred by 2020. A closer look at statistics, however, paints a less optimistic picture. The numbers are highest at the elementary and middle school level, while the majority of pupils choose to transfer to English-language institutions after completing grades 7 or 8. In 2022, for example, only three twelfth graders remained at Étoile de l'Acadie. This puts in doubt the success of efforts to build a strong attachment to francophone identity among students. Gisèle Belliveau,

a long-time teacher and principal at Étoile-de-l'Acadie, believes that a school alone cannot produce a vibrant francophone culture.<sup>106</sup> For the past twenty years, the Centre communautaire Étoile de l'Acadie has complemented the school's activities, serving as a gathering place for francophones in the Sydney area, but its efforts have met with limited success, as the cultural activities taking place there generally attract few participants.

Despite attempts to build a new francophone community in Industrial Cape Breton, Acadian culture still has very little visibility there, and contrary to the wishes expressed by Wayne Gaudet in 1999, the "Acadian star" does not shine in the Sydney area. The process of language assimilation that took place during most of the twentieth century has resulted in a situation where the remnants of an Acadian community have all but disappeared in Industrial Cape Breton. The renewal of Acadian communities in the Maritimes after their complete destruction in the mid-eighteenth century is rightly celebrated as the victory of a proud people who refused to lose their identity. But it is often forgotten that the success stories are largely confined to Eastern and Northern New Brunswick and to a lesser extent to the small pockets of francophone presence that persist today in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. Industrial Cape Breton provides us with a prime example of an area of Acadian settlement that suffered a steep decline rather than a renewal. It highlights how the obstacles faced by members of a minority-language group living in an uncooperative environment can sometimes be unsurmountable.

Recognizing the fact that few signs remain of three centuries of Acadian presence in Industrial Cape Breton, it is obvious that the lack of French schooling played a determining role in bringing about this negative outcome. One can only conclude that Joseph Boudreau was right to declare, in his 1969 brief to the Tribunal on Bilingual Higher Education, that the province of Nova Scotia had awakened to the need for French-language schooling twenty-five years too late. There was a potential to build a strong bilingual community in Industrial Cape Breton during the first half of the twentieth century, particularly in New Waterford, where French-speaking families were denied language rights for three generations. The battle for minority education rights was finally won thanks to the tireless efforts of a group of determined parents, but the descendants of the Acadian settlers in the area were no longer able to taste the victory, having lost their language and much of their cultural heritage. The outcome was unfortunate not only for the Acadian community but also for Industrial Cape Breton itself, as the area would have reaped enormous

economic and social benefits by becoming Nova Scotia's only bilingual urban centre.

## Notes

1. Mouhot, *Les réfugiés acadiens en France*, 343.
2. Vachon, "Les Acadiens de Little Bras d'Or, 1758–1859," 82.
3. Arthur de Gobineau, known by his title "Comte de Gobineau," acquired an infamous reputation because of his *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, published between 1853 and 1855, a blatantly racist study that had a marked influence on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Far Right movements and was a source of inspiration for members of the Nazi regime in Germany.
4. Gobineau, *Voyage à Terre-Neuve*, 102–3: "Presque tous ils ont à demi oublié ou plutôt n'ont jamais bien su l'idiome de leurs pères, et quand ils veulent s'en servir, ils le manient comme une langue étrangère et fort mal."
5. Bourinot, *Historical and Descriptive Account*, 103.
6. Bourinot, 104.
7. Ph.-F. Bourgeois, *Réunion plénière des Acadiens*, 1900, SB-13, Beaton Institute Archives (BI), Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS.
8. d'Entremont, "La Survivance acadienne en Nouvelle-Angleterre," 15.
9. Boudreau, *Chéticamp—Mémoires*, 33–37.
10. Noted from participants at an evening of storytelling, Glace Bay Public Library, Glace Bay, NS, 28 May 2015.
11. SYSCO *Steelworker Records—Cumulative List*, BI, Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS.
12. Gérald Aucoin (retired schoolteacher), in discussion with the author, Dartmouth, NS, 28 April 2013.
13. Contacts established through Sydney's francophone community centre, Le Centre communautaire Étoile-de-l'Acadie, greatly facilitated the process, although many of the interview sessions took place in the interviewees' homes. In each case, informants were simply encouraged to recount their family's history from the time of the arrival of their parents or grandparents in Industrial Cape Breton. Nearly all the interviews were conducted in French, and this had a positive effect on the outcome because the interviewees were able to use the language that was intimately linked to their memories of family life in the past.
14. J. J. Chiasson, *Un petit résumé de ma vie*, unpublished memoirs, 1925–1972, private collection of Elmira Dingwall. Translated by author.



15. J. J. Chiasson, interview by Elizabeth Beaton, 1980, T-1157, BI, Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS.
16. Aucoin, *Loiseau de la vérité et autres contes des pêcheurs acadiens du Cap-Breton*.
17. Nova Scotia Archives, "Men in the Mines," <https://novascotia.ca/archives/meninmines/timeline.asp?Language=English#1860>.
18. Hubert Muise, interview by Leslie MacLean, 1984, T-2159, BI, Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS.
19. Richard Chiasson, interview by author, tape recording, New Waterford, NS, 9 December 2014.
20. Joe Aucoin, interview by author, tape recording, New Waterford, NS, 5 May 2016.
21. Joseph Muise, interview by author, tape recording, New Waterford, NS, 19 August 2015.
22. Joseph Muise, interview by author, tape recording, New Waterford, NS, 19 August 2015.
23. Assomption Compagnie, *Assumption Life*.
24. Léger, *Les grandes lignes de l'histoire de la Société l'Assomption*.
25. *L'Assomption* 2, no. 1 (1911): 7.
26. *L'Assomption* 3, no. 9 (1912): 8.
27. Léger, *Les grandes lignes de l'histoire*, 90.
28. *L'Assomption* 5, nos. 8–9 (1914): 5.
29. Chiasson, "Fiset, Pierre," [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/fiset\\_pierre\\_13E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/fiset_pierre_13E.html).
30. *L'Assomption* 1, no. 3 (1910): 7; *L'Assomption* 4, no. 2 (1913): 7.
31. *L'Assomption* 2, no. 4 (1911): 3.
32. "Répertoire numérique détaillé," fond 77, La Société l'Assomption, Centre d'études acadiennes Anselme-Chiasson (CEAAC), Université de Moncton, Moncton, NB.
33. Léger, *Les grandes lignes de l'histoire*, 258–60.
34. *L'Assomption* 2, no. 8 (1911): 3.
35. LeBlanc, *Postcards from Acadie*, 118–20.
36. LeBlanc, 247–51.
37. *Mount Carmel Jubilee Booklet* (New Waterford, NS: n.p., 1935), 35.
38. In 1895, Pascal Poirier listed the names of twenty schoolteachers who taught in French in various local schools in Inverness and Richmond Counties; fond 6, box 3, folder 1, Pascal Poirier Fonds, CEAAC, Université de Moncton, Moncton, NB.
39. Minutes of School Board Meetings, New Waterford 1910–1943, fond 14, box 25B, BI, Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS.

40. *School Days* (New Waterford, NS, 1923), 4–6.
41. “Be Bilingual,” Student Community Service Group (New Waterford, NS, ca. 1970).
42. Minutes of School Board Meetings, New Waterford 1910–1943, fond 14, box 25B, BI, Cape Breton University, Sydney. Entry dated 16 July 1923.
43. Minutes of School Board Meetings, New Waterford 1910–1943, fond 14, box 25B, BI, Cape Breton University, Sydney. Entries dated 1 June 1927, 9 September 1927, 1 June 1928, 5 May 1929, 30 March 1930, 26 August 1930, 18 June 1931, 12 September 1931, 22 October 1931.
44. Richard Chiasson, interview by author, tape recording, New Waterford, NS, 9 December 2014.
45. Chiasson, interview. Translation by author.
46. Marie-Julie Lefort, interview by author, tape recording, New Waterford, NS, 26 May 2015.
47. Although the question of deciding whether to relocate to Chéticamp was not raised directly in interviews conducted by the author, Josephine LeBlanc, Denise Deveau, and Delphin Muise each addressed the topic spontaneously, and all three expressed similar opinions.
48. Joseph and Thérèse Cormier, interview by author, tape recording, Sydney, NS, 16 December 2014.
49. Joseph Boudreau, interview by Elizabeth Beaton, *Ethnic Corner*, Sydney Community Television, 6 February 1989, FT-1 videotape collection, BI, Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS.
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## 5 **The Disposition of the Ladies**

### **Mi'kmaw Women and the Removal of Kun'tewiktuk / King's Road Reserve, Sydney, Nova Scotia**

*Martha Walls*

In 1926, following a decades-long process, a small Mi'kmaw reserve on King's Road in Sydney, Nova Scotia—a place Mi'kmaq knew as Kun'tewiktuk—was relocated outside of city limits. Removal of this community was precipitated at the start of the twentieth century by petitions from prominent Sydney residents who were supported by the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA), the federal agency responsible for Indigenous peoples and their territories. The plan to relocate Kun'tewiktuk was initially frustrated by the Indian Act, federal legislation first passed in 1876 that created a web of laws around Indigenous peoples and their lands and that included the stipulation that any surrender of reserve land had to first be approved by a majority of men aged twenty-one or older in an “Indian band.” Not only did adult Mi'kmaw men at Kun'tewiktuk oppose surrender, but because all Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia were regarded under law as belonging to a single “band,” any surrender at King's Road would have required consent of all adult male Mi'kmaq, approval that was not sought by the DIA.<sup>1</sup> The federal government's solution to Mi'kmaq unwillingness to surrender their land at Kun'tewiktuk (and also a response to a similar intransigence of residents of urban reserves elsewhere in Canada) was the 1911 addition of Section 49A to the Indian Act. Section 49A, which allowed the federal Exchequer Court to ascertain if relocation of an urban reserve was ostensibly in the “best interests” of both its Indigenous inhabitants

of an urban reserve and the wider (non-Indigenous) population of a city, was an important turning point in the case of King's Road. The amendment offered a way around Indian Act rules on surrender and made possible the relocation of urban reserves even if the majority of male band members refused surrender. King's Road would be the first reserve in Canada to be subjected to Section 49A; the inaugural Exchequer Court hearing under its auspices was held in Sydney in September 1915 and concluded with a ruling that mandated the relocation of the Mi'kmaq at Kun'tewiktuk.

The 375-page transcript of the Exchequer Court proceedings offers insight into the decision to relocate the King's Road community. In addition to confirming a national twentieth-century discourse that highlighted the alleged incompatibility of Indigenous peoples with modern urban spaces, the hearings reveal how central were unflattering characterizations of Indigenous women to the court's decision to force the removal of Mi'kmaq from Kun'tewiktuk. It reveals that an influential settler population in Sydney, Nova Scotia, no less than those in other North American jurisdictions, perceived Indigenous peoples, and especially Indigenous women, as a particular impediment to urban "progress" and industrial development.

Testimony from the King's Road Exchequer Court hearing offers an opportunity to explore wider colonial processes that accompanied the removals of urban Indigenous peoples. Cities around the world as particular sites of colonialism have recently become objects of enquiry<sup>2</sup> with an underlying recognition being that settler towns and cities, built as they were on occupied Indigenous lands and along Indigenous waterways, were "not so much settled as 'resettled.'"<sup>3</sup> While research surrounding urban colonialism<sup>3</sup> in North America has focused on Western cities, notably Vancouver and Victoria, in the nineteenth century,<sup>4</sup> the King's Road relocation reveals that the uprooting of urban Indigenous peoples was part of an enduring continental colonial project that stretched to the east coast and well into the twentieth century.

The King's Road case is also important for its formative place in the creation of Section 49A of the Indian Act. The twentieth-century displacement of urban reserves, like older processes of colonization, was, as Louise Johnson makes clear, accomplished largely by bureaucratic means.<sup>5</sup> The removal of the reserve at Kun'tewiktuk was realized by a legal and judicial mechanism in the form of the creation of Section 49A and the Exchequer Court hearings. Fuelled by prominent and powerful settler men in Sydney, this bureaucratic process was a watershed moment in Canadian Indigenous policy.



Finally, the transcript of the 1915 Exchequer Court proceedings in Sydney provides a powerful lens through which to view how settlers' concepts of Indigenous femininity informed colonial processes in cities. While scholars such as Geoffrey York and William Wicken have explored the King's Road removal, they do not consider how intrinsic gender was to the process.<sup>6</sup> No Mi'kmaw women from King's Road testified before the Exchequer Court. In a way that symbolizes the tendencies of colonial power to simultaneously ignore and co-opt Indigenous women, representations of King's Road's women made in their absence were central to court proceedings.<sup>7</sup> Of the thirty-four witnesses called to testify, fifteen, or 44 percent, commented specifically on the women of King's Road; additional testimony addressed gendered matters of community life associated with women, such as child rearing and upkeep of domestic spaces. In many ways, the King's Road case confirms the observations of such scholars as Louise Johnson (1994), Jean Barman (2006), Joan Sangster (2005), Jarvis Brownlie (2005), and Penelope Edmonds (2010), who have emphasized that negative, racialized representations of Indigenous femininity shaped colonial processes.<sup>8</sup> However, the King's Road Reserve case adds a layer to this analysis, revealing that the colonial state's adoption of negative, gendered ideas was deliberate. The Exchequer Court judge in Sydney heard starkly divergent characterizations of Mi'kmaw women. Advocates for relocation advanced well-worn racist and sexist tropes that emphasized the moral and physical depravity of Mi'kmaw women, while defenders of the King's Road community championed women as respectable and hard-working. In his ruling, though, the central Canadian judge, who depended on local informants, blatantly ignored the latter and crafted a decision in support of relocation based on the negative characterizations of Mi'kmaw women. In this way, his ruling confirms Sarah Carter's observation that stereotypes of Indigenous women were "deliberately propagated by officials of the state" and reveals the extraordinary power of racialized concepts of gender in the formation of twentieth-century policy related to Indigenous peoples in Canada.<sup>9</sup>

The King's Road Reserve was situated on a main thoroughfare on the south side of Sydney. Kun'tewiktuk was part of the larger unceded Mi'kmaw territory of Mi'kma'ki, which enveloped the Maritime provinces and stretched into eastern Quebec and included Unama'ki, the Mi'kmaw name for Cape Breton Island.<sup>10</sup> Located on Sydney Harbour, Kun'tewiktuk offered access to oceanic resources, which were mainstays of Unama'ki Mi'kmaq. Unama'ki's five designated reserves of Potlotek (Chapel Island), Wagmatcook (Middle

River), Malagawatch, Whycomagh, and Eskasoni were all situated on the saltwater Bras d'Or Lake or other waterways. Until the second half of the nineteenth century, Kun'tewiktuk was not formally designated a reserve but was used in seasonal cycles.

Changing circumstances for Mi'kmaq led to a year-round settlement at Kun'tewiktuk. Over the nineteenth century, lifeways in Unama'ki were transformed. As customary lands and resources and access to both were diminished by settler encroachment and colonial laws, Mi'kmaq found new ways to create a degree of economic stability; they acted as guides for sport hunters, sold handcrafts to local markets, and worked for wages.<sup>11</sup> These adaptations prompted some Mi'kmaq to settle more permanently at Kun'tewiktuk, where proximity to Sydney allowed for sales of handcrafted items, particularly baskets, to households and businesses in the town. The site also provided access to wages as men from Kun'tewiktuk found employment with lumbering operations, on the railway, and in an expanding industrial sector and women worked in Sydney as domestic servants.<sup>12</sup> Over time, Mi'kmaq increasingly lived year round at Kun'tewiktuk, and in 1882, its population was large enough that Ottawa designated 2.07 acres there as the King's Road Reserve.<sup>13</sup> It was geographically the smallest reserve in Unama'ki and the only one in an urban centre.<sup>14</sup>

Many Kun'tewiktuk Mi'kmaq hailed from Eskasoni, which was forty kilometres away and accessible by canoe and a small portage between East Bay and Sydney River. At 2,800 acres, Eskasoni was geographically the largest reserve in Nova Scotia and held special political and spiritual importance as the seat of the Mi'kmaq Sante Mawiomi, or the Grand Council, an institution, headed by a grand chief, that remained important to the twentieth-century Mi'kmaq.<sup>15</sup> As King's Road emerged as a reserve in its own right and as its population rivalled and even surpassed that of Eskasoni (in 1910, the DIA counted 117 Mi'kmaq at Eskasoni, compared to Sydney's 127), strong ties continued to link the two reserves.<sup>16</sup> Political connections were particularly important, so much so that when King's Road elected its first Indian Act chief in 1902, the DIA was concerned that an elected chief operating so close to the orbit of the powerful grand chief would not be recognized by reserve residents. This concern was unfounded, as Mi'kmaq accepted the elected chief as a "headman" whose authority was secondary to that of the greatly esteemed grand chief.

Significantly, the urban location that endeared Kun'tewiktuk to the Mi'kmaq also led outsiders to covet reserve land. By the turn of the twentieth century, land at King's Road was attracting attention for its potential use as a residential area in the rapidly expanding industrial city. Sydney had seen its population increase from approximately ten thousand in 1901 to nearly seventeen thousand by 1915, urban growth that challenged the city's infrastructure and placed pressure on sewage systems, electrification, and water services as well as on residential areas.<sup>17</sup> As Sydney residents sought new places to build homes, the picturesque harbourside King's Road Reserve, touted by one witness to the Exchequer Court as the "playgrounds of the city," came to be regarded as prime residential real estate.<sup>18</sup> As non-Indigenous residents of Sydney eyed the King's Road Reserve, they recognized it as a parcel of land that might readily, and with state backing, be claimed by them. In a scenario echoing Jean Barman's description of non-Indigenous actors seeking reserve land in Vancouver, Sydney's prominent politicians and businessmen—men whose interests rested in "profit . . . and the formation of urban space in their own image"—clamoured for the land on which the King's Road Reserve stood.<sup>19</sup> Their vision of King's Road's future did not include Mi'kmaq.

These business interests found support in DIA officials, who agreed that reserve land at King's Road should be put to other purposes and the Mi'kmaq settled elsewhere. The DIA's interest in both the profit obtainable by selling reserve land and its support for moving Mi'kmaq out of cities was made clear by DIA decisions with respect to Mi'kmaq land in the Sydney area and elsewhere. Just six years after King's Road was established, the DIA sold 0.66 acres of the reserve to make way for railway tracks.<sup>20</sup> The DIA was also reluctant to support new urban reserves in industrial Sydney, as evidenced by its refusal in the first decade of the twentieth century to grant an urban tract to a settlement of around fifty Mi'kmaq in nearby North Sydney. Characterized by the DIA as "an indolent lot," the Mi'kmaq at North Sydney were considered illegal squatters on land owned by the Dominion Iron and Steel Company. Mi'kmaq in North Sydney, like the community at Kun'tewiktuk, chose that site so they could better access urban opportunities. The DIA, though, opposed the creation of a reserve at North Sydney. It not only refused to purchase reserve land there but also, in 1910, prohibited Mi'kmaq from North Sydney from moving to King's Road.<sup>21</sup> Instead, the DIA stated its preference for moving Mi'kmaq from both King's Road and North Sydney to outside city limits.<sup>22</sup> Legal technicalities led to a different trajectory for North Sydney. Although

the North Sydney Mi'kmaq, like residents of King's Road, "persist[ed] in their intention to remain where they are,"<sup>23</sup> they had little legal footing given that they were perceived to have settled "illegally" on nonreserve land. Unlike residents at King's Road who, for a time, had the backing of an Indian Act provision that demanded a land surrender before reserve land could be sold, the reserveless Mi'kmaq at North Sydney had little legal recourse when the DIA compelled them around 1910 to leave the site.<sup>24</sup> As Sarah Brennan has argued, the 1910 dispersal of the North Sydney Mi'kmaq (who were sent to other Mi'kmaw communities) "set the tone for what was to come at King's Road."<sup>25</sup>

While the DIA refused to create an urban reserve near Sydney and proved willing to displace local Mi'kmaq, it was also committed in the early twentieth century to generating revenue by selling reserve land identified as "surplus" and "unused." Duncan Campbell Scott, the deputy superintendent general of the DIA and "principal architect" of Canadian "Indian" policy from 1913 to 1932, was particularly committed to reducing the number of Nova Scotia reserves through sale and to relocating Mi'kmaq as sales occurred.<sup>26</sup> In early 1918, Scott undertook a survey of Nova Scotia's reserves, instructing Nova Scotia Indian superintendent A. J. Boyd to forward to the DIA "specific information . . . with a view of determining the salability of each particular reserve."<sup>27</sup> Later that year, Scott clarified that he would consider selling not only *uninhabited* reserves but also "reserves on which Indians reside, but of which they are not making sufficient use."<sup>28</sup> The definition of what constituted "sufficient use" rested with the DIA.

Attitudes of Sydney's non-Indigenous residents who lobbied for Mi'kmaw relocation aligned with the DIA's interest in both removing Indigenous peoples from cities and dispensing with reserve lands. Echoing arguments that would become familiar as Indigenous communities butted against expanding cities across Canada, settler residents of Sydney complained that the potential of the land on which the King's Road Reserve stood would not be realized so long as it was occupied by a culturally moribund population that impeded modern "progress." As numerous scholars have observed, Indigenous peoples and cities were at this time viewed as an "impossible contradiction";<sup>29</sup> they were "incongruous"<sup>30</sup> and "mutually exclusive."<sup>31</sup>

Leading the charge to remove Mi'kmaq from King's Road was Sydney lawyer Joseph A. Gillies, an occasional member of Parliament for the Nova Scotia riding of Richmond.<sup>32</sup> Gillies owned property adjacent to the King's

Road Reserve and, from the late 1880s, used his political leverage to seek the relocation of his Mi'kmaw neighbours, whom he regarded as a "great nuisance."<sup>33</sup> Gillies's cause was amplified in the *Sydney Daily Post*, the local newspaper that he had purchased in 1901. Gillies, like relocation advocates in other Canadian cities, was clearly motivated by self-interest.<sup>34</sup> His involvement with the King's Road Reserve was initially piqued by concerns about the value of his own property that abutted the reserve. Gillies's personal stake in relocation grew as Ottawa purchased from him another piece of land—a tract outside the city that, for a time, was to become home to the King's Road Mi'kmaq.<sup>35</sup> A prominent resident of Sydney with ties to the federal government, Gillies transformed his self-interest into a wider campaign for Mi'kmaw removal that found resonance with Sydney property owners, political allies, real estate agents, and the city's mayor and council, which in early 1915 passed a resolution demanding that "the Government of Canada . . . immediately take necessary steps for the removal of the Indians from their present location upon the King's Road."<sup>36</sup> From the outset, DIA officials supported Gillies's crusade and worked to secure a land surrender from the Mi'kmaq. James Smart, the deputy minister of the Department of the Interior, which was the administrative home of the DIA in 1899, endorsed the King's Road Reserve relocation and urged, "If anything can be done to relieve the situation I see no reason why it should not be done. I can well understand the annoyance caused by these Indians hanging around [Gillies's] premises all the time."<sup>37</sup> A decided lack of local support for the small reserve,<sup>38</sup> coupled with the DIA's stark receptiveness to Gillies's agitation, resulted in repeated DIA efforts to convince the King's Road Mi'kmaq to relocate outside of the city. Despite this pressure, the Mi'kmaq, like Indigenous peoples in other cities, refused to leave.<sup>39</sup> Mi'kmaw resistance was initially taken up by Grand Chief John Denny, from nearby Eskasoni, the seat of the Sante Mawiomi. In November 1899, after consulting with "my people," Chief Denny advised Ottawa that the Mi'kmaq would concede to relocation only if the reserve was replaced by an urban tract "within one mile" of the existing one.<sup>40</sup> When Ottawa refused this request, the grand chief retracted his conditional support for removal and returned to the DIA an unsigned land surrender.<sup>41</sup>

Mi'kmaq refusal to endorse surrender was a blow to relocation as the Indian Act made clear that any land surrender required the signed consent of a majority of a band's male residents aged twenty-one or older.<sup>42</sup> For its part, the King's Road community seems to have regarded the matter as closed,

for in 1910, it petitioned Ottawa for much-needed additional housing on the reserve.<sup>43</sup> However, the relocation lobby continued, and Gillies urged Ottawa to amend the Indian Act “to enable the Department to . . . readily deal with a case of this kind.”<sup>44</sup> Whether a response to this particular request or to similar demands emanating from other Canadian cities, in 1911 Ottawa added Section 49A to the Indian Act, allowing for the forced removal of urban reserves when a “band” refused to surrender. A move in keeping with Ottawa’s early twentieth-century commitment to strengthening its assimilative capacities in the face of mounting criticisms, Section 49A allowed that when cities of eight thousand or more residents petitioned for the removal of a reserve, said reserve could be forced to move if an Exchequer Court ruled that relocation was in the best interests of both reserve residents and the wider city.<sup>45</sup>

Following the Indian Act amendment, the DIA secretary advised the Mi’kmaq that he did “not consider it advisable to resort to this [Section 49A]” but that in the absence of their willingness to sign a surrender, the DIA would do just that.<sup>46</sup> Much to Ottawa’s chagrin, the Mi’kmaq “refused absolutely to entertain any proposition looking to disturb them in their present situation within the city limits.”<sup>47</sup> A series of Indian Act chiefs and councillors, the first of which had been elected at King’s Road in 1902, led Mi’kmaq opposition to relocation.<sup>48</sup> In light of sustained resistance, the King’s Road Reserve earned the dubious distinction of being the first—but not the last—reserve in a Canadian city to be subject to Section 49 of the Indian Act and an Exchequer Court hearing that would determine its fate.

The Exchequer Court hearing, held in Sydney from 20 to 24 September 1915, was presided over by Judge Louis Arthur Audette, a federal judge from Quebec whose career spanned 1912 to 1931<sup>49</sup> and who, on several occasions, was called upon to adjudicate federal cases involving Mi’kmaq.<sup>50</sup> Appointed by Audette to represent the Mi’kmaq and to present the case for preserving the King’s Road Reserve was George A. Rowlings, a prominent Conservative lawyer and two-time federal candidate from Guysborough County, Nova Scotia.<sup>51</sup> To make the case for relocation, Audette appointed none other than Joseph A. Gillies, the man who had waged a decades-long campaign to remove Mi’kmaq from King’s Road. Before and throughout the five-day proceedings, Gillies’s *Sydney Daily Post* publicly built his case for relocation. Leading up to the hearing, Gillies ran an editorial arguing for the necessity of “cleaning up” an unnamed city neighbourhood that was rife with “unsanitary conditions and open immorality”<sup>52</sup>—a scenario that laid the groundwork for

a prorelocation perspective. The *Sydney Daily Post* reported court testimony in an overtly partisan way. For instance, on 20 September, the first day of the hearing, Gillies's paper outlined what would become his paternalistic position in court: that "the removal of the reservation to a more suitable locality had become imperative not so much from the point of view of the section of the city concerned as an act of justice to the Micmac residents themselves."<sup>53</sup>

As per the new Section 49A of the Indian Act, the court's mandated task to consider equally the interests of both the "public" (meaning non-Mi'kmaq residents of Sydney) and the "Indians of the band" (the Mi'kmaq of Kun'tewiktuk) gave to its proceedings a veneer of impartiality.<sup>54</sup> The thinness of this veneer, though, is revealed by the court's lengthy transcript. While the trial was intended to represent the interests of both sides in the case, it was heavily stacked against the Mi'kmaq. The hearings also illuminated how negative conceptions of Indigenous femininity shaped the ultimate decision of the federal court and the fate of Kun'tewiktuk.

The roster of called witnesses revealed stark bias against the Mi'kmaq (see table 5.1). Of the total thirty-four witnesses who appeared before Judge Audette, twenty-six (76.5 percent) were called in support of relocation; of them, most were in fact holders of land near or adjacent to the reserve or real estate agents who were interested in land sales. Rowlings identified the self-interest of Gillies's witness roster and complained that it "consists wholly of land dealers and speculators . . . and people living in the vicinity of the Reserve, who naturally have their views in regard to their personal dealings in the matter."<sup>55</sup> These witnesses also tended to be strangers to the community, many admitting under oath that they had little familiarity with the Mi'kmaq. For example, when asked, "Have you ever been on the reserve?" witness John Midgley, who owned property near the reserve, testified, "No, I have not, just passing by."<sup>56</sup> Another witness, Supreme Court Judge Walter Crowe, commented, "I have not been on the Reservation since over fifteen years ago, probably."<sup>57</sup> Such revelations prompted Judge Audette to critique witnesses' obvious self-interest and lack of expertise and to remind Gillies that it was his responsibility to "defend the public's interest and not his own," something one is "very likely to lose sight of, when [one has oneself] as a client."<sup>58</sup>

In contrast to the large number of witnesses called to support the cause of relocation, only eight witnesses (23.5 percent) endorsed the maintenance of the King's Road Reserve. Just three of these witnesses (8.8 percent)—elected chief Joe Christmas, his son Ben (who would be elected chief in 1919), and

**Table 5.1.** Composition of witnesses for the King’s Road Exchequer Court hearing

Witnesses	Number	Percentage
Total	34	100
Support relocation	26	76.5
Oppose relocation	8	23.5
Non-Mi’kmaq	31	91.2
Mi’kmaq	3	8.8

former chief Joe Julien—lived in the community. The remaining five witnesses were interested parties who, through their jobs as service providers, their work for the DIA, or their affiliations with the Roman Catholic Church, had considerable familiarity with the King’s Road community. This imbalance ensured that Mi’kmaq voices were underrepresented and that testimony endorsing the sale and relocation of the King’s Road Reserve monopolized the court’s proceedings.

Analyses of the identities of the witnesses who appeared before the court reveal another serious imbalance: not a single Mi’kmaq woman was called to testify before the court (see table 5.2).

Despite the fact that women composed an important constituency in the community, roughly half of the King’s Road population, their absence from the witness stand should come as no surprise.<sup>59</sup> Although Mi’kmaq women, like Indigenous women across the country, were not silent on political matters, often taking pen to paper to write of their concerns to state officials or engaging in political “acts of refutation,” which included the refusal to vacate land, they were, in 1915, both on and off reserve, excluded from the male-dominated world of formal politics.<sup>60</sup> In rules laid out by the Indian Act, women could not participate in land surrenders, a process involving men of age twenty-one or older. Moreover, like non-Indigenous women, Mi’kmaq women could not vote or hold office provincially or federally. Women were additionally barred from voting in band elections and from serving as chiefs or councillors, an exclusion that held until 1951.<sup>61</sup> Although the King’s Road debate coincided with a *first-wave* feminist movement that called for greater political equality for women, the exclusion of Indigenous women from the campaigns waged by Euro-Canadian feminists ensured that the political marginalization of Indigenous women remained largely unchecked in this era.<sup>62</sup>



**Table 5.2.** Gender of witnesses for the King's Road Exchequer Court hearing

Witnesses	Number	Percentage
Total	34	100
Non-Mi'kmaw men	29	85.3
Non-Mi'kmaw women	2	5.9
Mi'kmaw men	3	8.8
Mi'kmaw women	0	0

Despite their immediate exclusion from the Exchequer Court proceedings, women of the King's Road Reserve—or rather, nameless representations of them—were central to the arguments made by both sides. Such a focus emerged from Gillies's questioning, which from the outset invoked images of Mi'kmaw women. Emphasis on the women of King's Road might also have been expected given the central place that Indigenous women had long held in federal Indigenous policy and in the public's interest in those policies. Ottawa had always viewed Indigenous women as requiring particular reformation.<sup>63</sup> Of special concern was the perceived sexual autonomy of Indigenous women, which was blamed for subverting the modesty and subordination that marked middle-class ideals about women's sexuality. Indigenous women were, even more than other marginalized and stigmatized groups of women, essentialized as being promiscuous. Their alleged immorality was regarded not just as a personal moral failing but as a threat to the stability of a patriarchal Euro-Canadian society.<sup>64</sup> Consequently, Canadian Indigenous policy of the late nineteenth century, an era in which the ideology of separate spheres idealized women as chaste wives and mothers, was fixated on erasing Indigenous women's autonomy and subordinating their sexuality as well as their economic, social, and political roles to men. This policy was also to work on another level; once assimilated, it was anticipated that Indigenous women would further the assimilative agenda of the state by encouraging their spouses and children to do the same. Enduring concerns about Indigenous women, combined with widespread critiques of an assimilative federal policy perceived as failing, sharpened Canadians' worries about Indigenous women.

An almost neurotic interest in Indigenous women's sexuality led to heightened surveillance and reform initiatives. Among these was the vigorous implementation of a nationwide field matron program (including at Kun'tewiktuk),

which saw “respectable white women” dispatched by the DIA to serve as watchdogs and to support assimilation by “encourag[ing] the Indian women and girls to make their homes more like those of white people.”<sup>65</sup> This same era featured a national social reform movement aimed at remedying a perceived crisis in families that was blamed largely upon the alleged deterioration of sexual morality among urban women and girls.<sup>66</sup> Indigenous women occupied a disproportionate level of concern<sup>67</sup> and evoked particular anxieties in *nervous* colonial cities where real and imagined sexual relationships between Indigenous women and non-Indigenous men raised concerns about moral propriety, venereal disease, urban health, and cross-racial miscegenation.<sup>68</sup> Thus feared, urban Indigenous women were particularly susceptible to surveillance and control by police who interpreted city laws and statutes.<sup>69</sup> Such anxieties clearly informed Sydney residents who took the Exchequer Court stand in support of the King’s Road Reserve relocation.

Mi’kmaq women emerged in Judge Audette’s court in various and conflicting ways, evoked very differently by the two sides in the case. Collectively, witnesses called by Gillies who supported the sale and relocation of the reserve endorsed stereotypes that underscored the rationale of gendered Canadian Indigenous policy of the early twentieth century—that is, that Mi’kmaq women were morally depraved and, having failed to be transformed by earlier assimilative policies, remained devoid of the vestiges of respectable middle-class femininity. Gillies and his prorelocation witnesses drew on these unflattering stereotypes, and their testimonies fixated on Mi’kmaq women’s sexuality: women of King’s Road were depicted as intemperate, immoral, and lascivious. This characterization overtly served Gillies’s aims, for it not only portrayed Mi’kmaq women as being endangered by their proximity to Sydney and rescuable by their removal from it but also cast them as figures whose immorality threatened surrounding neighbourhoods. By emphasizing that relocation would benefit both residents of King’s Road, especially women, and protect the wider city of Sydney, this characterization fulfilled the Exchequer Court’s mandate.

Sydney was a multinational place where aspirations to “whiteness” were undercut by the presence of not only Indigenous people but also non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants, many of whom had settled in Whitney Pier, a working-class neighbourhood near the city’s steel plant and coke ovens. The presence of undesirable *others* and fears about cross-racial miscegenation sharpened criticisms of Mi’kmaq women. One of the sustained lines of argument made by

Gillies's witnesses was that the urban location of the reserve exposed morally susceptible Mi'kmaw women to the corrupting influences of foreigners—most particularly, “the negroes” who worked in nearby coke ovens.<sup>70</sup> Gillies's witnesses advanced that this *foreign element* posed two interrelated threats: First, allegedly, the foreigners had a tendency to illegally ply Mi'kmaw women with alcohol and, in the process, break both the city ban on the sale of alcohol and the Indian Act regulations that criminalized the sale of alcohol to Indigenous people. Second, Gillies's witnesses proposed that once tempted by drink, Mi'kmaw women were inclined to engage in illicit sexual behaviour.

In his opening salvo before the court, Gillies seized on this dual danger facing Mi'kmaw women who lived on King's Road near Sydney's “undesirable . . . foreign element.”<sup>71</sup> Gillies testified that the women of King's Road were in a “very debauched” condition. Not only did they frequently secure alcohol and become “staggering drunk,” but, he alleged, in this state, they would “on many occasions” go with “negroes and disreputable characters . . . into the woods.”<sup>72</sup> Gillies's meaning was (quite deliberately) only very thinly veiled—he was clearly suggesting that these were illicit sexual liaisons between Mi'kmaw women and unscrupulous foreign men. Witness Robert McLean, a real estate agent who had gained his *expertise* in the reserve via a single visit made ten years earlier, presented a similarly sensational scenario. When asked by Gillies to describe the women's “character when they are drunk and under the influence,” McLean claimed that “the bad ones are bad immorally. . . . I mean they will go with anybody, sleep with them, and have sexual intercourse.”<sup>73</sup> The conclusion to be drawn from these sordid allegations—allegations that were admittedly not based on first-hand knowledge—was that the proximity of the reserve to the city of Sydney exposed morally susceptible Mi'kmaw women to vice and morally susceptible men to Mi'kmaw women. Only the removal of the community to a remote location would alleviate this two-pronged danger.

Gillies's witnesses exploited the caricature of the *drunken squaw*—a term used with abandon on the witness stand. As Adele Perry has argued, the use of the derisive term *squaw* excluded Indigenous women from the realm of respectable womanhood and, in so doing, justified their exclusion from Euro-Canadian cities that valued the uplifting presence of Anglo-Saxon women.<sup>74</sup> While a “squaw” was at once a person to be pitied, witnesses also made clear that inebriated Mi'kmaw women posed a threat to surrounding neighbourhoods. Witness John Parker, for example, testified that his family had been

occasionally “molested at night” by drunken Mi’kmaw women.<sup>75</sup> Under cross-examination by Rowlings, Parker admitted that by the term *molested*, he actually meant “disturbed.”<sup>76</sup> Parker’s intent was obvious; his use of the word *molested* evoked the dangerous sexuality of Mi’kmaw women and clearly presented them as a threat to Sydney.

While Rowlings criticized Parker’s testimony as misleading, other witnesses reinforced the theme that the women of the King’s Road Reserve posed a threat to the city of Sydney. For example, real estate agent Henry Frowde alleged that residents of Sydney felt imperilled by the “disposition of the ladies” there, that they were in “dread of being in the vicinity of the Indians.”<sup>77</sup> Demonstrating the depth of the townspeople’s alleged fear, Frowde proposed, “If I say to a little girl ‘I will send for the Indians,’ she will run.”<sup>78</sup> In this manner, the reserve, and its women in particular, were depicted as a menace to the city. As the discourse surrounding the *drunken squaw* suggests, there was a fine line between Mi’kmaw women being the victims of urban vice and danger and their being the cause of it.

In other ways, Gillies’s witnesses presented the reserve as a threat to the city of Sydney, and they linked this threat back to the character of Mi’kmaw women and their many shortcomings, notably as homemakers. Gillies’s witnesses emphasized that they believed that the small reserve, home to 123 people in 1915, was too congested, particularly given the absence of water and sewerage services. The population density of the reserve and its access to services were, in and of themselves, not the problem—after all, other Sydney neighbourhoods, such as Whitney Pier, were even more densely populated and also underserved by city water and sewerage. At issue was the *way* that people lived: the homes were said to be ramshackle and basic protocols of hygiene overlooked. These conditions made the reserve not only an eyesore but also, more sinisterly, a public health menace. Such concerns clearly borrowed from—and fuelled—nationwide anxieties about public health and moral hygiene that existed from the 1880s through to the end of World War I.<sup>79</sup> Nationally, many marginalized people living in impoverished conditions bore the brunt of such concerns, but at King’s Road, blame for this state of affairs was placed firmly on the shoulders of women who, as disorderly “squaws,” had by nature no regard for tidiness or sanitation. Historian Kristin Burnett makes clear the link between concerns over reserve hygiene and Indigenous women, noting that a federal public health program founded on Canadian reserves in

1915 featured nurses whose main tasks were to tie “household management and childcare practices to ill health and high infant mortality rates.”<sup>80</sup>

The appearances of women at King’s Road were offered as proof of their alleged failure to create a clean and hygienic community and were something upon which several of Gillies’s witnesses commented. Real estate agent Henry Frowde, recounting one of his rare visits to the reserve, testified that while there, he “found the women sitting around the doorsteps with their hair hanging down their backs and dressed more or less disheveled.”<sup>81</sup> Such alleged inattention to personal grooming was linked to a more sinister carelessness: Mi’kmaq women were said to have rejected even the most rudimentary practices of hygiene. Witnesses contended that women of the reserve routinely threw their “slop pails” of “household waste . . . out of their backdoor which is at somebody else’s front door.”<sup>82</sup> The consequence of such “carelessness,” it was alleged, was the creation on the reserve of a noxious sludge in which “children wallowed,” a critique that marked the women’s maternal capabilities for criticism.<sup>83</sup> Worse still was the accusation that Mi’kmaq women compounded this mess by responding “to the cause of nature” anywhere they pleased.<sup>84</sup> Said one witness, “At their doors . . . the women in particular . . . go outside . . . and squat down [to urinate].”<sup>85</sup> Other witnesses likewise contended that “squaws and younger children” relieved themselves along the railway track that ran near the reserve.<sup>86</sup> These allegations about the toileting practices of women not only denigrated their respectable femininity in a dramatic way but also threw their very humanity into question. In addition, these tales offered further evidence of the health risk posed by a “filthy” community.<sup>87</sup> Virtually every one of Gillies’s witnesses, including the many who acknowledged they had never set foot on the reserve, described in vivid detail the alleged stench of the King’s Road community. Not only was this odour said to devalue properties near the reserve, but it also led to assertions that the reserve was a dangerous breeding ground for contagious diseases.<sup>88</sup>

Mi’kmaq women’s supposed shortcomings as housekeepers, combined with their reputedly unhygienic and disorderly natures, created in the testimony an image of the King’s Road Reserve as a public health menace. Gillies’s questioning—which picked up threads of stories published in his newspaper—guided testimony in this direction, as he was committed to demonstrating the veracity of his own opinion that the reserve was “certainly very dangerous to the public health.”<sup>89</sup> The portrayal of the King’s Road Reserve as a filthy breeding ground for deadly disease perfectly served the

prorelocation argument, for it made clear that relocation would, by freeing Sydney of a public health menace, be in the city's best interest—a burden of proof demanded of the Exchequer Court proceedings. The collective depiction of Mi'kmaw women offered by Gillies's prorelocation witnesses, then, drew on long-standing stereotypes of Indigenous women as sexually immoral and as poor homemakers to present this segment of the community as threats to themselves and to the wider city. The sole solution to this two-part problem, Gillies's witnesses contended, was the sale of the reserve and the relocation of its residents.

This portrayal did not go uncontested, however. Rowlings's witnesses who opposed relocation questioned the very premise that Mi'kmaw women were inherently immoral and unkempt and instead championed the female residents of King's Road as industrious workers who, in their well-maintained homes and through their paid employment, offered important support to their families. These witnesses confirm Penelope Edmond's observation that urban colonial spaces were "mixed, uneasy, and transformative" places where derision and fear of Indigenous peoples existed alongside both dissenting perspectives and an at times grudging recognition of the need for their labour.<sup>90</sup> Presenting Mi'kmaw women in this alternative way, Rowlings suggested that the Mi'kmaq were good neighbours whose continued presence in the city would benefit the people of Sydney as well as the reserve residents whose own economic well-being depended on the maintenance of their King's Road location.

Witnesses subpoenaed by George Rowlings in support of the community offered very different accounts of the women living at Kun'tewiktuk. As individuals with close ties to the reserve and its residents, these witnesses offered a far less salacious—and doubtless a far more realistic—portrayal of Mi'kmaw women. Rowlings's witnesses rejected the notion that Mi'kmaw women were morally bereft, intemperate, and in need of intervention. Instead, their testimony emphasized that female residents were law-abiding, diligent workers who made valuable economic contributions to their community. Their key argument against the sale and relocation of the reserve was that removal from the city bounds would undermine the city-based occupations that supported men and women in the community.

The antirelocation witnesses resoundingly challenged the stereotypical depictions of women proffered by those called to the stand by Gillies. Those who supported the maintenance of the reserve discredited the *drunken squaw*

caricature offered by Gillies's witnesses. When Sydney's stipendiary magistrate Daniel Cameron, a man who since 1905 had heard many cases involving public intoxication, appeared before the court, Gillies attempted to draw from him testimony that confirmed the propensity of Mi'kmaq women to drink. Cameron, however, rebuffed this questioning, asserting that when it came to alcohol-related infractions, "the record of the Indians is a good one."<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, Cameron undermined Gillies's *drunken squaw* character by emphasizing that only one Mi'kmaq woman had come before him for drunkenness in his seven years as a stipendiary magistrate. Far from being morally depraved, Cameron described this woman as a law-abiding, dedicated employee who, on occasion only, suffered a "weakness for taking drinks."<sup>92</sup> Other witnesses affirmed Cameron's testimony, including the only two women to appear on the stand. These women, both non-Mi'kmaq former day school teachers on the reserve, emphasized the peaceful tenor of reserve life and denied ever having witnessed any public drunkenness.<sup>93</sup>

Rowlings's witnesses also challenged the assertion that the women of King's Road were inept in their domestic responsibilities. Former Indian agent and physician to King's Road Dr. Duncan McIntyre insisted that the women of the reserve were "clean in their habits and paid . . . attention to cleaning their houses and that kind of thing."<sup>94</sup> Although McIntyre patronizingly attributed this attentive cleanliness to DIA guidance and the work of the reserve's federal day school teachers, who successfully "[taught] them how to keep their houses neat and clean," he nevertheless denied that Mi'kmaq women were slovenly and unhygienic.<sup>95</sup>

Rowlings's witnesses denied that the reserve was mired in filth. Although they acknowledged that its sewage service was not up to the most modern standards due to the DIA having begun but never completed the installation of a sewage system there, Sydney health officer John Knox McLeod was quick to point out that in this condition, the reserve was no different than other underserved areas of the city.<sup>96</sup> Blame for the lack of sewerage services was not placed on the Mi'kmaq but rested with the failure of the DIA to fulfill its responsibilities to the community. Parish priest Donald McAdam, for one, was clear that any issues with sanitation on the reserve would be easily rectified "with a little more generosity and care on the part of the Department [of Indian Affairs]."<sup>97</sup>

Rowlings's witnesses undermined Gillies's fearmongering about the reserve being a hotbed of dangerous contagions. McLeod testified that apart from a

single case of typhoid, there had been “no cases reported” of any disease on the reserve.<sup>98</sup> Former Indian agent Duncan McIntyre and his successor, Cecil Sparrow, physicians both, confirmed this claim. McIntyre insisted that Mi’kmaq were no more prone to contagious diseases such as tuberculosis than any other “class of people.”<sup>99</sup> Both agent-doctors agreed that “there has not been any sickness to speak of, no epidemics of any kind, no infectious disease of any kind such as Scarlet Fever and the usual infectious diseases as Measles, children’s diseases of any kind to speak of.”<sup>100</sup> Such statements were confirmed by the parish priest, Donald McAdam, who noted that in the fifteen years in which he had served the community, he had seen no epidemics among them. Collectively, Rowlings’s witnesses emphasized that Mi’kmaq women were temperate, law-abiding residents of a clean and disease-free community. According to this testimony, the city of Sydney was in no way imperilled by the presence of women on the King’s Road Reserve or, indeed, by the reserve itself.

Finally, Rowlings’s witnesses revealed the centrality of women to the reserve’s financial circumstances by emphasizing the important economic roles the women of King’s Road played and linking their abilities to fulfill those roles to their community’s urban location. Much like Mi’kmaq women of earlier decades identified by Andrew Parnaby, women at King’s Road manufactured baskets and other items for sale in Sydney.<sup>101</sup> In addition, by the turn of the century, many women at King’s Road had, like their male counterparts, entered the world of the waged economy made possible by their proximity to the city.<sup>102</sup> According to the testimony of Chief Joseph Christmas, “pretty near all” of the women from King’s Road worked for wages in Sydney.<sup>103</sup> Somewhat ironically, in light of their alleged slovenliness, the many Mi’kmaq women who worked for wages did so as domestics hired to clean homes and businesses in Sydney. A line of employment shared with immigrant and other marginalized women, such work was also one type for which Mi’kmaq women, like other Indigenous women in Canada, were specifically groomed by federal policy and programs such as the field matron program and residential schools.<sup>104</sup>

The wages earned by women at King’s Road were important to their families. While domestics’ wages were low, so were the earnings of labouring Mi’kmaq men. As a result, households at King’s Road, like working-class households elsewhere, probably depended on two (or more) incomes to make ends meet. It is also likely that by the turn of the twentieth century, the waged work of women at King’s Road had grown relatively more important to families’ survival as men’s wage-earning prospects diminished.<sup>105</sup> In his



testimony before the court, Chief Joseph Christmas explained how his own once lucrative business manufacturing pick handles for use in Cape Breton coal mines and oars for boats had, in recent years, been undermined by the factory production of these two commodities.<sup>106</sup> As male lines of work such as this were undercut, it seems likely that women's paid labour became relatively more important to households at King's Road. If this is the case, it may be that gender divisions of labour at King's Road stood in contrast to a wider Unama'ki trend identified by Andrew Parnaby whereby Mi'kmaw men of the late nineteenth century earned "the lion's share of family income."<sup>107</sup> Regardless, it is clear that female labour formed an important part of the domestic economy at King's Road, something that was stressed by Rowlings's witnesses, who were adamant that women's access to work in Sydney in and of itself justified the maintenance of the King's Road Reserve. Without fail, Rowlings's witnesses stressed that the removal of the Mi'kmaq from King's Road to a site farther from the city would severely imperil women's (and men's) abilities to earn incomes. As the Indian agent emphasized on the witness stand, for Mi'kmaw wage workers, the location of the King's Road Reserve "could not be improved upon."<sup>108</sup>

The descriptions of women that emerge from the two sides of the King's Road case are very different. Joseph Gillies's prorelocation faction—men with plenty of interest in reserve land but little connection to, or respect for, the community—drew on age-old stereotypes that unflatteringly cast Mi'kmaw women as morally susceptible and dangerous. In contrast, Rowlings's witnesses—individuals who had knowledge of and sometimes close ties to the King's Road community—revealed that Mi'kmaw women, far from being conduits of urban vices, were law-abiding, diligent workers who brought stability to their community by carving out important—if modest—employment niches in the expanding industrial city of Sydney. There is no doubt that Rowlings's case against the King's Road Reserve relocation offered a vision of Mi'kmaw women that was truer to the reality of women's daily life on King's Road in the opening decades of the twentieth century. Despite the convincing argument that relocation of the community would bring tremendous hardship to families who depended on its proximity to urban-based employment, however, Justice Audette ruled that "having regard to the interest of the public and the Indians located on the small Sydney Reserve . . . the said Indians shall be removed from such Reserve."<sup>109</sup>

Audette's assertion that "the Reserve retards . . . the development of that part of the city" closely adhered to a wider sentiment asserting that Indigenous people were anathema to urban progress.<sup>110</sup> In making this case, though, he drew heavily on the exchanges about Mi'kmaq women that had figured so prominently in the hearings. Audette specifically noted the importance of moving the Mi'kmaq "to another place outside the limits of the city of Sydney," where they would be "away from the liquor shops and the undesirable foreigners settled at the Coke Ovens"—the foreigners with whom Mi'kmaq women were accused of having sexual relations.<sup>111</sup> He also emphasized that relocation was warranted because "the Indians have not been always considerate and mindful of their neighbours in respect of cleanliness"—a remark that clearly reflected commentary about Mi'kmaq women's substandard cleanliness and that ignored refutation of these claims by Rowlings's witnesses.<sup>112</sup> Audette's ruling entirely disregarded the importance of being close to Sydney for work purposes. His final judgment that "what the Indian may lose from the convenience of close neighborhood to his place of labour . . . will be offset by the advantage of a large plot of territory" dismissed the testimony that identified Mi'kmaq women's domestic work as being important to residents of the community.<sup>113</sup> Ironically, the waged labour and *white work* that the DIA promoted in the early twentieth century as a solution to the poverty of Indigenous people and an antidote to their *Indian* characters were entirely disregarded by the Exchequer Court.

The proceedings of Audette's court were in no way impartial. The hearings, like the Indian Act amendment that allowed for them, were intended not to objectively explore the relocation issue but, rather, to create a legal mechanism to overcome the Mi'kmaq's refusal to surrender their Sydney reserve. Ian Bushnell, in his study of Canada's federal court, reveals that Audette stood accused of "moulding law to agree with his conception of justice." In the King's Road case, his conception of justice clearly favoured non-Mi'kmaq residents of Sydney and was one in which "racism dominated."<sup>114</sup> In weighing the evidence, Audette chose to accept Gillies's rationale to make Gillies's private interests seem public. Audette gave no weight to testimony that disputed Gillies's racist, sexist, and colonialist logic. In making a decision about what was in the public interest, Audette was overwhelmingly influenced by the negative stereotypes of Indigenous femininity that were proffered in his court. Despite pointed and convincing refutations of these stereotypes by witnesses who best knew the reserve and its residents, the Exchequer Court

perpetuated these characterizations and used them to present the King's Road Reserve as a moral and physical threat to public health, citizen morality, and urban progress in Sydney.

Judge Audette's ruling—that relocation was in the best interests of the Mi'kmaq and of other Sydney residents—erased the Mi'kmaq's legal foothold to resistance at Kun'tewiktuk. The Mi'kmaq, however, held on to their urban settlement for more than a decade. Preoccupation with World War I probably slowed relocation initially,<sup>115</sup> but so did wrangling over relocation sites and Mi'kmaw refusal to accept relocation on Ottawa's terms. Following the Exchequer Court hearing, the Mi'kmaq petitioned for and against various locales being considered for a postrelocation reserve,<sup>116</sup> a level of engagement that frustrated the DIA and prompted one official to lament that “the Indians . . . are still as unreasonable as they have always been in the past, in this connection.”<sup>117</sup> Even when, in 1921, their fate seemed sealed as Ottawa bought a piece of land slated to be home to the removed Mi'kmaq—a tract owned by Gillies<sup>118</sup>—the purchase of which the Mi'kmaq vehemently opposed, relocation did not proceed. William Wicken links uncertainty surrounding the 1921 federal election to a slowdown in the relocation process,<sup>119</sup> but surely the Mi'kmaq's opposition to the purchased site also discouraged action. Elected chief and councillors did not mince words, declaring that after “inspecting this land from one end to the other,” the community would refuse to move there except by force.<sup>120</sup> It was only in 1924 that Mi'kmaw opposition to relocation unravelled. This circumstance, though, was no capitulation; it was, instead, a response to deteriorating conditions at King's Road that were caused by a DIA-enacted building moratorium at the site and resultant overcrowding. In light of these difficulties, Chief Christmas petitioned for removal.<sup>121</sup> A new site, one endorsed by Superintendent Boyd for being “far enough from the city but not too far,” was chosen.<sup>122</sup> Chief Christmas and the Mi'kmaq, desperate for more land and better DIA support, grudgingly agreed to move there. By late summer of 1925, the construction of homes was underway, and by June of 1926, the relocation of the King's Road Mi'kmaq to the site that would become known as Membertou was completed.

The relocation of the King's Road Reserve was the outcome of a long-running process made possible by the 1911 amendment of the Indian Act, which empowered a federal Exchequer Court to decide the fate of urban reserves in Canada. The archival record, premised largely on exchanges between male DIA officials and Mi'kmaw men who headed the elected council

at the King's Road Reserve, is devoid of the perspectives on relocation of the women who lived there. Still, Mi'kmaw women ultimately mattered very much to the relocation process. Central to the testimony presented to the Exchequer Court were the witnesses' varied characterizations of Mi'kmaw women. Those who supported the relocation of the reserve portrayed women as immoral and intemperate and as moral and physical threats to both their community and the wider Sydney environs. In contrast, witnesses who believed that the reserve should be maintained depicted the same women as lawful, sober, and hard-working assets to their community and to the city of Sydney. Judge Audette's ruling reveals an overwhelming acceptance of the negative characterizations of Mi'kmaw women, and this perspective buttressed his ruling, which called for the removal of the King's Road Reserve. The King's Road Exchequer Court hearing, a milestone in Canadian Indigenous policy, starkly reveals the pervasive and insidious way in which racialized concepts of Indigenous femininity shaped Indigenous policy in Canada well into the twentieth century.

## Notes

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1. Wicken, *Colonization of Mi'kmaw*.
2. Hamer, *New Towns in the New World*; Peters, "Our City Indians," 75–92; Johnson, "Occupying the Suburban Frontier," 141–68; Thrush, "City of Changes," 89–117; Thrush, *Native Seattle*; Freeman, "Toronto Has No History," 21–35.
3. Blomley, *Unsettling the City*, 110.
4. Barman, "Erasing Indigeneity in Vancouver," 3–30; Barman, "Race, Greed, and Something More"; Edmonds, "From Bedlam to Incorporation"; Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers*; Mawani, "Legal Geographies of Aboriginal Segregation"; Stanger-Ross, "Municipal Colonialism," 541–80; Wood, "Pressured from All Sides," 112–29.
5. Johnson, "Occupying the Suburban Frontier."
6. York, *Dispossessed*; Wicken, *Colonization of Mi'kmaw*.
7. As Mary-Ellen Kelm and Lorna Townsend remind us, the long failure of scholars, politicians, and missionaries in recognizing the voices of Indigenous

- women did not mean that Indigenous women were silent. See Kelm and Townsend, introduction, 3–25.
8. Johnson, “Occupying the Suburban Frontier”; Barman, “Taming Aboriginal Sexuality,” 270–300; Sangster, “Domesticating Girls,” 179–201; Brownlie, “Intimate Surveillance,” 160–78; Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers*.
  9. Carter, “Categories and Terrains of Exclusion,” 32.
  10. Despite the existence of reserves designed to isolate and contain them, the Mi’kmaq continued to live off reserve and move about their wider territory, harvesting resources. For further discussion, see Gonzales, *Changing Economic Roles*; Wicken, *Colonization of Mi’kmaq*; Walls, “No Need of a Chief for This Band.”
  11. Gonzales, *Changing Economic Roles*, 93–94.
  12. Gonzales, 93–94; Walls, “No Need of a Chief for This Band.”
  13. Wicken, *Colonization of Mi’kmaq*.
  14. In 1910, an Indian Affairs census identified the size and populations of the other Cape Breton Indian reserves as follows: Potlotek/Chapel Island was a 1,200-acre reserve in Richmond County that was home to 104 people; the 650-acre Wagmatcook / Middle River Reserve in Victoria County was home to 97 people; and of the two Inverness County reserves, Malagawatch was 1,200 acres with 38 residents, while Whycomomagh was a 1,555-acre reserve home to 122 people. Eskasoni, meanwhile, was a 2,800-acre reserve with 117 people reported living there in 1910. “Indian Census,” 1910, vol. 3159, file 359,999–1, RG 10, Indian Affairs Fonds, Library and Archives Canada (LAC).
  15. Walls, “No Need of a Chief for This Band”; Wicken, *Colonization of Mi’kmaq*.
  16. “Indian Census,” 1910.
  17. McCann, “1890s,” 119–54; Howell, “1900s,” 155–91.
  18. *Gillies v. the King*, Exchequer Court of Canada, Case 2787, transcript of proceedings, 21 September 1915, LAC, RG 10, vol. 7762, file 27061-F, 126.
  19. Barman, “Race, Greed, and Something More,” 156.
  20. J. D. McLean, “Letter to D. McDonald, 5 November 1907,” vol. 2925, file 190,094-1, RG 10, Indian Affairs Fonds, LAC.
  21. Joseph Christmas and John D. Paul, “Letter to DIA, 17 February 1910,” vol. 2925, file 190,094-1, RG 10, Indian Affairs Fonds, LAC.
  22. A. J. Boyd, “Letter to J. D. McLean, 22 September 1911,” vol. 2925, file 190,094-1, RG 10, Indian Affairs Fonds, LAC.
  23. Boyd.
  24. A. J. Boyd, “Letter to Deputy Superintendent, 15 June 1909,” vol. 3103, file 307576, RG 10, Indian Affairs Fonds, LAC.

25. Brennan, "Revisiting the 'Proverbial Tin Cup,'" 83.
26. Titley, *Narrow Vision*, 22.
27. D. C. Scott, "Letter to A. J. Boyd, 22 February 1918," vol. 3183, file 454,854, RG 10, Indian Affairs Fonds, LAC.
28. D. C. Scott, "Letter to A. J. Boyd, 23 April 1918," vol. 3183, file 454,854, RG 10, Indian Affairs Fonds, LAC.
29. Peters, "'Urban' and 'Aboriginal,'" 47–62.
30. Hamer, *New Towns in the New World*, 217.
31. Thrush, "City of Changes," 93.
32. Born in 1849 and trained as a lawyer, Joseph Alexander Gillies was named solicitor to the municipality of Sydney in 1883. In 1887, Gillies made his first—albeit unsuccessful—bid to become a member of Parliament for his home riding of Richmond. In 1891, Gillies was elected to the House of Commons. Later that year, he lost his seat in a petition, but he regained it in an 1892 by-election. He was reelected in 1896. Gillies reoffered for this federal seat in 1900, 1904, and 1911 but failed in all three bids. He did not live to see the 1925 relocation of the Sydney Mi'kmaq, as he died in 1921. See Parliament of Canada, "Cape Breton-Canso, N.S. 2004-05-23," [https://lop.parl.ca/sites/ParlInfo/default/en\\_CA/ElectionsRidings/Ridings/Profile?OrganizationId=1697](https://lop.parl.ca/sites/ParlInfo/default/en_CA/ElectionsRidings/Ridings/Profile?OrganizationId=1697); Cochrane, *Canadian Album*; York, *Dispossessed*. Gillies purchased his land on King's Road in 1877, five years before it was designated as an Indian reserve. Historian William Wicken speaks to the force of Gillies's personality, noting he was "not a man to be trifled with." Wicken, *Colonization of Mi'kmaw*, 214.
33. J. A. Gillies, "Letter to S. Stewart, 28 October 1889," vol. 2925, file 190,094, RG 10, Indian Affairs fonds. LAC.
34. Barman, "Race, Greed, and Something More."
35. D. C. Scott, "Memorandum, 13 June 1921," vol. 7761, file 27061-1A, RG 10, Indian Affairs Fonds, LAC.
36. A. C. McIntyre, "Letter to C. J. Sparrow, 12 February 1915," vol. 2925, file 190,094-1, RG 10, Indian Affairs Fonds, LAC.
37. James Smart, "Letter to Mr. McLean, 3 November 1899," vol. 2925, file 190,094-1, RG 10, Indian Affairs Fonds, LAC.
38. As William Wicken suggests, the 1915 Exchequer Court process would reveal in Sydney a "deep antipathy" toward the Mi'kmaq, as "there is no evidence that working people, or their unions, rallied support to the beleaguered Mi'kmaq community." Wicken, *Colonization of Mi'kmaw*, 227.
39. Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers*.
40. John Denny, "Letter to Rev. Cameron, 28 November 1899," vol. 2925, file 190,094-1, RG 10, Indian Affairs Fonds, LAC.

41. A. Cameron, "Letter to Secretary of the DIA, 16 January 1900," vol. 2925, file 190,094-1, RG 10, Indian Affairs Fonds, LAC.
42. Indian Act, R.S.C. 1985, c. I-5 (Can.), § 26.
43. Joseph Christmas and John D. Paul, "Letter to DIA, 17 February 1910," vol. 2925, file 190,094-1, RG 10, Indian Affairs Fonds, LAC.
44. J. A. Gillies, "Letter to Frank Oliver, 15 December 1910," vol. 2925, file 190,094-1, RG 10, Indian Affairs Fonds, LAC.
45. In 1920, for example, coercion was increased with regard to schooling, which became mandatory for students ages seven to fifteen. See Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision*. In that same year, Ottawa heightened its ability to compel the enfranchisement of Indian men. See Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens*.
46. J. D. McLean, "Letter to Charles Parker, Esq, 19 March 1912," vol. 2925, file 190,094-1, RG 10, Indian Affairs Fonds, LAC.
47. A. J. Boyd, "Letter to J. D. McLean, 16 October 1912," vol. 2925, file 190,094-1, RG 10, Indian Affairs Fonds, LAC.
48. Walls, "No Need of a Chief for This Band."
49. Bushnell, *History of the Federal Court of Canada*.
50. In 1934, Judge Audette presided over hearings related to the flogging of nineteen students accused of stealing \$53.44 from the sister superior at the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School in Nova Scotia. The punishment, meted out by the school principal, left lasting scars on the boys and cost one of them a kidney. Charges of excessive use of force found their way to a formal complaint. In June 1934, the DIA held public hearings regarding the matter, and Audette was tasked with determining whether the principal had used excessive force. Audette's ruling determined that, far from being guilty of a crime, the principal "should be commended and congratulated for carefully investigating the conduct of his pupils and finding all the culprits and punishing them in a commensurate manner." The punishment, Audette is reported as having said, was "quite reasonable and adequate . . . and was in no way excessive." Knockwood, *Out of the Depths*, 147-49.
51. Rowlings made a run for the federal Conservative seat in Guysborough County in 1908 and again in 1911, losing both times to Liberal John Sinclair. Canada, Library of Parliament, Guysborough County.
52. *Sydney Daily Post*, 2 September 1915, 4, reel 1362, Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management (NSARM).
53. "Indian Reservation Inquiry," *Sydney Daily Post*, 20 September 1915, 3, reel 1362, NSARM.
54. Gillies v. the King, 1.
55. Gillies v. the King, 364.

56. Gillies v. the King, 58.
57. Gillies v. the King, 88.
58. Gillies v. The King, 24.
59. The 1911 census revealed that 105 people lived on the reserve and that 25 of the 60 residents who were fifteen years old or older were women.
60. On Indigenous women's gendered strategies of resistance, see Brownlie, "Intimate Surveillance," 172–73. The expression "acts of refutation" is from Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers*, 151.
61. Walls, "No Need of a Chief for This Band."
62. Forestell, introduction, 3–20.
63. For an excellent recent overview of the colonial policies that specifically targeted Indigenous women in Canada, see Stote, *Act of Genocide*.
64. Brownlie, "Intimate Surveillance."
65. Burnett, *Taking Medicine*, 144.
66. Tice, *Tales of Wayward Girls*.
67. Sangster, "Domesticating Girls."
68. Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers*, 151.
69. Edmonds, 151; Mawani, "Legal Geographies of Aboriginal Segregation."
70. Gillies v. the King, 25.
71. Gillies v. the King, 57.
72. Gillies v. the King, 25–26.
73. Gillies v. the King, 106.
74. Perry, *On the Edge of Empire*.
75. Gillies v. the King, 128.
76. Gillies v. the King, 130.
77. Gillies v. the King, 154.
78. Gillies v. the King, 154.
79. Rutherford, "She Was a Ragged Little Thing," 228–45.
80. Burnett, *Taking Medicine*, 144.
81. Gillies v. the King, 153.
82. Gillies v. the King, 46.
83. Gillies v. the King, 74.
84. Gillies v. the King, 172.
85. Gillies v. the King, 104.
86. Gillies v. the King, 99.
87. Gillies v. the King, 126, 170.
88. Gillies v. the King, 37–38, 58–59, 72–73, 93, 103, 163.
89. Gillies v. the King, 36.
90. Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers*, 143.



91. Gillies v. the King, 271.
92. Gillies v. the King, 271.
93. Gillies v. the King, 280, 286.
94. Gillies v. the King, 213.
95. Gillies v. the King, 213.
96. Gillies v. the King, 55–56.
97. Gillies v. the King, 267.
98. Gillies v. the King, 56.
99. Gillies v. the King, 224.
100. Gillies v. the King, 231–32.
101. Parnaby, “Cultural Economy of Survival,” 69–98.
102. W. D. Hamilton, writing of the day school operating in Sydney in the early twentieth century, notes that “the mothers, with few exceptions, hire out as domestics.” Hamilton asserted that this practice negatively influenced day school as older school-aged children were kept from school while their mothers worked. See Hamilton, *Federal Indian Day Schools*, 120.
103. Gillies v. the King, 133.
104. Mary Jane Logan McCallum notes that as many as 36 percent to 57 percent of First Nations women in Canada between 1920 and 1940 worked as domestic labourers. McCallum, *Indigenous Women*, 26–27.
105. Parr, “Rethinking Work and Kinship,” 220–40.
106. Gillies v. the King, 344.
107. Parnaby, “Cultural Economy of Survival,” 93.
108. Gillies v. the King, 233.
109. Exchequer Court of Canada, *RE Indian Reserve, City of Sydney, N.S.*
110. Exchequer Court of Canada, 317.
111. Exchequer Court of Canada, 321.
112. Exchequer Court of Canada, 318.
113. Exchequer Court of Canada, 320.
114. Bushnell, *History of the Federal Court of Canada*, 106, 109.
115. While domestic matters took a back seat to wartime events generally, local Indian Affairs activities were also probably slowed by the deployment of the Sydney Indian agent Dr. C. J. Sparrow in the fall of 1915, shortly after his testimony before the Exchequer Court. See G. A. Rowlings, “Letter to DIA, 23 October 1915,” vol. 2925, file 190,094-1, RG 10, Indian Affairs Fonds, LAC.
116. Indians of Sydney, “Letter to C. C. Parker, 12 July 1920,” vol. 7761, file 27061-1A, RG 10, Indian Affairs Fonds, LAC; Donald Robertson, “Letter to J. D. McLean, 30 July 1921,” vol. 7761, file 27061-1A, RG 10, Indian Affairs Fonds, LAC.

117. C. C. Parker, "Letter to Duncan Campbell Scott, 20 July 1920," vol. 7761, file 27061-1A, RG 10, Indian Affairs Fonds, LAC.
118. D. C. Scott, "Memorandum, 13 June 1921," vol. 7761, file 27061-1A, RG 10, Indian Affairs Fonds, LAC.
119. Wicken, *Colonization of Mi'kmaw*.
120. Chief Joe Marshall and John Gould, "Letter to C. J. Sparrow, 18 November 1920," vol. 7761, file 27061-1A, RG 10, Indian Affairs Fonds, LAC.
121. B. E. Christmas, "Letter to John K. McLeod, Sydney Medical Officer, 28 July 1924," vol. 7761, file 27061-1A, RG 10, Indian Affairs Fonds, LAC.
122. A. J. Boyd, "Letter to D. C. Scott, 30 October 1922," vol. 7761, file 27061-1A, RG 10, Indian Affairs Fonds, LAC.

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Part 2  
**Legacies**

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## 6 C. B. Wade, Research Director and Labour Historian, 1944–50

*David Frank*

He drove into Glace Bay over dirt roads, through clouds of coal dust, and past rows of housing in disrepair. He was coming from the green fields and grey towers of Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. Now he was answering an invitation from one of Canada's largest unions, District 26 of the United Mine Workers of America (UMW), the branch of the international union that represented coal miners in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. In the changing world of industrial relations in the 1940s, the miners' union was one of the first in Canada to recognize the need for research staff. The age of industrial legality meant that contracts were more complex to negotiate and administer, there were more briefs and submissions to prepare, and new laws and regulations required constant attention. For many unions, there were also political and social objectives associated with the social democratic agenda of the times. With the election of a new leadership in 1942, District 26 was determined to promote improved conditions in the coal towns and a strategy to stabilize the coal industry. These aims pushed the union to document the needs of their members and their communities and bring the union's policies to wider public attention.<sup>1</sup>

Beginning in 1944 and for the next six years, these were the main challenges facing C. B. Wade as the union's director of research and education. Even before he arrived, the federal government had announced its intention to appoint the Royal Commission on Coal, and the union wanted to prepare the case for public ownership. Then in 1947, District 26 was out on a long

strike against the Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation (DOSCO), the first major strike since 1925, and again the union needed to deliver their message and win public support. Wade was at the centre of these efforts. Meanwhile, he researched and wrote a history of District 26 that has been recognized as a pioneering contribution to the field of labour history.<sup>2</sup> In the context of the present book, this chapter attempts to capture a historical moment in the “long twentieth century” when “oppositional” forces represented by the miners’ union took a strong stand against the “dominant” culture of modernist industrial capitalism. In the process, they often drew on the “residual” energies embedded in local labour history to make their case for the needs of the coal miners and the long-term future of the local and regional economy.

Across North America in the 1930s and 1940s, hundreds of politically sympathetic intellectuals brought their energy and skills to the union movement. For this new stratum of labour staff, the link between knowledge and power was not a theoretical concept but part of a struggle to advance the status of workers. As Wendy Cuthbertson has pointed out, one of their missions was to create “a union world—a union public sphere” that articulated a discourse of citizenship rights and placed workers at the centre of postwar reconstruction efforts.<sup>3</sup> However, this was not a stable context. While the negotiation of compromises between labour, capital, and the state gave union staff an increasingly central role in the stabilization of labour relations, it also exposed them to the successive pressures of wartime mobilization, postwar expectations, and a looming Cold War.<sup>4</sup>

## Workers’ Education

Claude Bates Wade’s road to Glace Bay started in upper-middle-class Edwardian England. He was born in 1906 near Liverpool, the son of a stationery wholesaler who became a manufacturer of fountain pens. He remembered a strict family upbringing, and at public school, mischief was punished with caning. Wade was expected to enter the family business, but in 1923, he visited an older uncle in Toronto and decided to remain in Canada. In his first years, he went west on the harvest excursions and was also hired out as a cowboy. He also picked up the lifelong nickname “Jim,” which was used by family and friends.<sup>5</sup>

Wade’s uncle insisted that the young man further his education and, to this end, funded his training in Toronto as a chartered accountant. When

Wade completed the programme in 1933, he counted himself fortunate to find work at Queen's University, which administered courses and exams set by the Institute of Chartered Accountants. His position there became more secure over time, and by 1939–40, he was listed in the annual *Calendar of the School of Commerce and Administration* as an instructor in chartered accountancy.<sup>6</sup> Wade also began to publish professionally at this time, notably a series of articles in *Canadian Chartered Accountant*. These raised questions about accepted methods of calculating profits and evaluating assets as practised by major Canadian corporations. None of the findings would be surprising to specialists, but Wade highlighted the ways that financial statements could be adjusted, if not manipulated, to meet corporate needs.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) attracted Wade's interest. This organization was founded in Toronto at the end of World War I on a model of collaboration between academic institutions and trade unions. By the 1930s, under full-time general secretary Drummond Wren, the association was not only pursuing "education for citizenship" but also providing training and assistance to unions. The WEA published research bulletins and pamphlets, participated in radio broadcasts, and distributed filmstrips and films to study groups.<sup>8</sup> There is a reference to Wade's activity in the Kingston branch as early as November 1939, when Wren refers to "our friend on the accounting end," and Wren later visited with him during an Industrial Relations Conference at Queen's.<sup>9</sup> Following that, they were in continual contact, and in 1941, Wade agreed to write a regular page on finance and related matters for the WEA's *Labor News*.<sup>10</sup>

During his time in Kingston, Wade interacted with a range of people on the political left. According to their daughter's recollection, her mother considered Wade to be "only a Bertrand Russell socialist" when they first met. In Kingston, however, they both moved further to the left and belonged to a circle of intellectuals associated with the WEA and the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order as well as the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation and the Communist Party, later the Labor-Progressive Party (LPP). One of this group was Idele Wilson, a University of British Columbia graduate who had studied economic history and labour relations at the University of Toronto and the London School of Economics before going to work for the WEA and then as research director for the United Electrical Workers.<sup>11</sup> Wade's associates were by no means all Communists, but he has stated that he came under the influence of faculty who were party members and soon was "with them." "At the time

everybody was in the CCF [Co-operative Commonwealth Federation],” his daughter has recalled, “and they were trying to move it to the left.”<sup>12</sup>

## District 26

In the early 1940s, labour politics in District 26 of the United Mine Workers took a turn to the left. At a time when many unions were struggling to win recognition, the miners’ union was already an established organization with collective bargaining rights. These had been achieved at the end of World War I and were successfully defended in the labour wars of the 1920s. Under wartime conditions, traditions of militancy were reasserted in efforts to reverse the wage losses of the past decades. A number of rank-and-file actions, including a slowdown strike in 1941, challenged the incumbent union leadership, and in 1942 new officers were elected. Many came from the ranks of the rival “red” union of the 1930s, the Amalgamated Mine Workers of Nova Scotia (AMW), whose members had returned to the UMW. The most prominent officers were AMW veterans such as Adam Scott as secretary treasurer, John Alex MacDonald as international board member, and Tom Ling as vice-president. The president, Freeman Jenkins, was a less experienced twenty-eight-year-old activist from one of the Glace Bay locals.<sup>13</sup>

Before Wade, there was, briefly, Eugene Forsey, a McGill University graduate and Rhodes Scholar who had returned from Oxford in 1929 to lecture in politics and economics at McGill. After the university dismissed Forsey in 1941, primarily due to his political activism on behalf of the CCF, he became research director for the new Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL). When Forsey came to Glace Bay in 1943 to help prepare a union brief, he recalls welcoming the assignment with enthusiasm: “I had a burning desire to be of use to workers who, in my judgement, had long been oppressed, exploited, and swindled.”<sup>14</sup> Forsey articulated the union’s themes clearly: first, that “maximum production of Nova Scotia coal is essential in the national interest,” and secondly, that “the mine workers must be paid decent wages, whether through higher prices, subsidies to private enterprise, or nationalization, with such subsidies from public funds as may prove necessary.”<sup>15</sup>

This was the context in which Wade was recruited. When Drummond Wren learned that District 26 was looking for a research director, he recommended Wade as “an outstanding authority on accounting, public and industrial finances.” After receiving an interested response, he informed Wade that

President Jenkins wanted to know if he would accept the position.<sup>16</sup> Wade has also recalled that A. A. MacLeod, one of the most influential organizers for the LPP, encouraged him to go to Glace Bay. MacLeod himself was a Cape Bretoner by origins and a regular visitor there; he was well aware of the situation in District 26 and hoped that the new officers would benefit from experienced and politically sympathetic staff.<sup>17</sup> By November 1944, Wade was in Glace Bay.

He later summarized his “routine work” in a list of activities: unemployment insurance cases and old-age pensions; briefs, letters, and resolutions; data on cost-of-living and wages; analysis of legislation; clippings on the industry, unions, and provincial affairs; information for the *Glace Bay Gazette*; and bulletins to board members.<sup>18</sup> He also undertook research on social security provisions for the coal miners. In 1945, he requested an estimate from Sun Life of what would be needed to provide a pension of \$30 a month for all miners from age sixty. The answer was that a lump sum of \$6.5 million would cover fifteen hundred men already on pension, plus an annual premium of \$2.5 million to provide for more than eighty-five hundred men under sixty.<sup>19</sup> Wade also helped sort out the financial arrangements for the *Glace Bay Gazette*, the daily newspaper that the union had purchased in 1942.<sup>20</sup> In addition, he assisted in promoting public libraries in Cape Breton, working on town plans for Glace Bay and Sydney, and preparing local radio broadcasts.<sup>21</sup>

From the beginning, the most urgent task was to prepare for hearings of the Royal Commission on Coal, whose scope included questions of production and distribution, employment, industrial relations, government assistance, and other conditions affecting the industry’s future.<sup>22</sup> A preliminary submission went forward in January 1945, signalling that the union planned to address issues from the standpoint of regional and national development on the grounds that “the fundamental interests of labor are also the basic interests of the great majority of Canadians.”<sup>23</sup>

As part of the preparations, District 26 contracted the country’s leading labour lawyer, J. L. Cohen, to prepare the union brief and act as counsel at the hearings. Wade assembled information and ideas for Cohen. In March 1945, for instance, he considered the problem of making a reasonable estimate of the coal reserves available for production. Wade underlined the idea that “Canada must have *the largest possible domestic source of supply to take care of any stoppage in the supply of American coal*” and that this would require subventions to assist in transportation. It was also important to continue urging industrial expansion and diversification in the Maritimes. Any temptation

to limit coal production to regional needs would have to be resisted on the grounds that “*a vast transfer of population*” out of the region was objectionable and impracticable. Wade followed up with notes on the wasteful policy of extracting the highest quality coal while leaving large reserves of lesser quality coal untouched that could be utilized with improved attention to washing and treating coal and better burning equipment. The underlying criticism was that the coal companies were poor stewards of the resource: “All this, in my opinion, is a sign of apathy and lack of interest in expanding the market. It is the natural behaviour one would anticipate from a quasi-monopoly operating in isolation and in a one-industry, one-company area. It is BESCO all over again.”<sup>24</sup>

Later the same month, Wade commented realistically on the idea of “conservation” as applied to a nonrenewable resource such as coal: “There can be no possible sense in trying to make a coal mine last 150 instead of 100 years. To attempt to postpone the inevitable is like trying to grasp the infinite; alright for theologians I dare say.” He added, “We should strenuously oppose the notion of ‘prolonging the agony’ by stringing out Nova Scotia coal production as long as possible.” Although a change in the economic base was ultimately inevitable, “conservation” should mean efficient extraction and utilization in order to promote the fullest practical use of the resource.<sup>25</sup>

These were only a few of the elements needed for the full brief, but working with Cohen was difficult. The lawyer’s work for other unions and on civil liberties cases was overwhelming. As his biographer has shown, he was nearing physical exhaustion and personal collapse. In June one of the union officers worried that time was running short. Wade then took on more responsibility and worked with one of Cohen’s assistants to complete preparations for the hearings in Sydney.<sup>26</sup> Cohen attended, but it fell to Wade to present and defend the seventy-eight-page brief.<sup>27</sup>

The union submission made a coherent, often eloquent argument for the place of the coal industry in plans for postwar social reconstruction and economic development. What the coal miners wanted was “a decent standard of living firmly based on continuous employment and decent wages, healthy social conditions and social amenities, ample cultural facilities and full opportunities for the advancement of their children.” Moreover, the miners claimed a vested interest in the success of the industry: “The fact that the company leases the coal and owns and manages the equipment is not the basis for an interest and pride greater than ours who spend one-third of our adult lives

in the pit and whose food, shelter, wives, children and pleasures are so largely dependent on efficient coal production.”

Turning to the question of government assistance, it was in the public interest to promote the stability of the industry, both to ensure a reliable supply of fuel to the Canadian market and to prevent a massive depopulation of communities dependent on coal. Modernization would require mechanization, but new machinery would face less resistance if linked to the opening of new seams, new public works, and new industries. The union also argued that higher living standards were essential to attract younger men to go into the pits after they returned from the armed forces or finished school, and pension plans could offer retirement for coal miners at the age of fifty-five. As for industrial relations, the charge was that management refused to accept the union as an equal partner and continued to follow outdated policies: “The ‘Company’ is like the smoke and the soot: an endless, wearying, destructive, senseless battle must be fought against an unyielding enemy.” DOSCO and its predecessors had earned their reputation for poor management and failed leadership over many years, and the logical answer was to bring coal under public ownership as a public utility.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, the union was preparing for an aggressive round of collective bargaining. The mood was apparent at the district convention in October 1946, which called for a wage increase of \$2.50 a day, a reduced workweek, and a pension fund supported by the coal royalties. When the company refused to discuss a pension plan and insisted that any wage increases must depend on greater productivity, negotiations broke down. The union reduced its wage demand to \$1.40 a day, but by February the strike was underway, and it lasted through to June. In their hopes for significant gains, the coal miners were adding to the high tide of strike activity across the country during the immediate postwar years. As Courtney MacIsaac has put it in her study of these events, “The coal miners’ expectations and views had solidified around the idea of major improvements in status and conditions, and neither the employers’ resistance nor the government’s efforts to stave off the conflict were succeeding.”<sup>29</sup>

In helping run the union campaign, Wade’s “strike publicity” included leaflets, releases, and widely distributed open letters. There were radio talks on the CBC network as well as on Nova Scotia stations and in union towns such as Hamilton and Oshawa in Ontario. He was particularly pleased with a half-page advertisement, “What Have They Been Telling *YOU* about *US*?”

that ran in newspapers in British Columbia, Ontario, and Nova Scotia.<sup>30</sup> Wade also wrote a short leaflet, *Robbing the Mines*, that drew on the royal commission evidence to document DOSCO's failure to reinvest in the coal industry: "It is surely obvious that productivity must fall, sooner or later, when an industry already burdened with obsolete and worn-out equipment is robbed so efficiently."<sup>31</sup>

When the strike ended, there was still an atmosphere of distrust. Members approved a settlement that gave them an increase of one dollar a day, and another forty cents if production levels increased. But Wade worried that the implications of the strike were not understood—that it was more than "a matter of dollars and tons of coal that might be earned and that might be mined."<sup>32</sup> From this point of view, the strike was not a success. The royal commission had failed to support public ownership, and the concerns about social conditions had not been adequately addressed. MacIsaac has observed that "the long-term goals of industrial democracy were not greatly advanced."<sup>33</sup>

Meanwhile, as the largest union in the province, District 26 was also directing attention to issues of concern to other workers. Although the coal miners came under federal jurisdiction, when the Nova Scotia Trade Union Act was under revision in 1947, Wade attended the hearings on behalf of the union. His presentation outlined a set of principles to promote stable industrial relations. Employers should recognize the right of workers to union representation and "the highest standards of wages and other working conditions attainable." Employees should accept the right of businesses "to plan, direct and manage the business so as neither health nor safety are endangered." And to address the "inherent inequality of economic or bargaining strength" between workers and employers, governments should "enact labour relations legislation that will, in so far as legislation can, modify this inherent inequality, in favour of the worker." This was a recipe not for social revolution but for accommodation, the integration of unions into the evolving labour relations system, and it would especially benefit unions with less bargaining power and political influence than the coal miners.<sup>34</sup>

There was much more for unions to do. In an article on the "Unorganized in Nova Scotia," Wade noted that only about 25 percent of the labour force was unionized: "They also require a union if they are to become active and influential as citizens in a way that the casting of a vote on election day can never by itself, make possible." Wade's discussion went on to single out the twenty-five thousand "girls and women" whose low wages limited the province's



purchasing power and undermined the standard of living. He reported that women workers were employed for average wages as low as thirty-seven cents an hour in textile factories and thirty cents an hour at telephone companies. "The obvious solution," he concluded, "is to get these workers organized."<sup>35</sup>

In another initiative, Wade prepared a set of questions to submit to C. D. Howe, minister of reconstruction and supply. The purpose was to urge Ottawa to investigate DOSCO's failure to expand basic steel production and develop an export trade in secondary products. Howe's predictable response was that "it is not considered a function of the Crown to compel a privately owned corporation to expand its operations beyond a point considered financially and economically sound by that corporation's management." Wade assembled Howe's replies in a press release, which was distributed with a covering statement signed by Jenkins: "In wartime the Crown was willing to 'compel' corporations to do all kinds of things. But apparently it is quite unwilling in any way to interfere with private industry when a great social problem such as chronic unemployment in the Maritimes, demands such interference."<sup>36</sup>

Some of Wade's most striking analysis came in a series of articles published in the *Glace Bay Gazette* on "Centralization and Unemployment." Here he applied the Marxist concept of the concentration and centralization of capital to the conditions of underemployment in the region:

The location of industry follows certain laws of capitalist growth. It is ridiculous to blame government for those laws; for they are brought into action by capital owners, not government. What can, and should, be done is to demand that government restrict the working of such of these laws as are harmful. But if one is to demand that government de-centralize industry in favour of a more even social and economic development of every portion of Canada, then it must be clearly understood that one is interfering with the autonomy and profit interests of large-scale industry.<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, Wade did not hesitate to state the political conclusions that followed:

It is essential that the Maritime people recognize that capitalism, by its own momentum of growth as it were, leads to centralization. But this centralization need not be merely geographic; it inevitably involves also a centralization of ownership, of control and of funds for investment in industry, in every area. Thus, the problem of the Maritimes is *not* one only of centralization of industry in Central Canada; *it is also one of*

*centralization of big business control both in Central Canada and Nova Scotia itself.*<sup>38</sup>

This kind of language, pointing to capitalism as the essential cause of regional disparity, was rarely heard in the political economy of the region prior to the popularization of underdevelopment theories in the 1970s.<sup>39</sup>

During this period, Wade also produced radio programming under the title “Labour Leads the Way.” The script for a broadcast on CJCB on 11 June 1948 demonstrates Wade’s skillful use of radio in the service of local labour history. In explaining the origins of Davis Day, the coal miners’ annual day of “remembrance and tribute,” the text begins with a narrator reviewing the coal miners’ history as a struggle to harness nature and to achieve freedom from exploitation. The narrator then introduces a series of events from the founding of the Provincial Workmen’s Association on 1 September 1879 to the 1925 strike and the shooting of William Davis by company police on 11 June that year. The script is punctuated with cues for music and comments by witnesses to the history. A concluding statement by Jenkins is given in full (as written by Wade):

For at least 100 years many working people have dreamed of creating the kind of social and economic institution in which the man working for himself will know he is working also for the common good; and when he works for the common good he will know he is working for himself. So, just as we have built machines and mastered nature with them, we must now build a society which we control. . . . In this way we can carry on the work and bring true the dreams, of those we now remember.<sup>40</sup>

## The Dismissal

There had been anxieties about Wade from the start. As early as December 1944, Silby Barrett (the former international board member for District 26 and now a key figure in the leadership of the Canadian Congress of Labour) wrote to UMW international president John L. Lewis about Wade: “He has been very active since taking his position with the District in regard to Communist Activities. I think that something should be done about it or later on we may have more trouble than what we anticipate.”<sup>41</sup> Wade’s presumed politics also seemed to be general knowledge at Dominion Steel and Coal. In a 1968

interview, the company's former director of public relations stated that Wade was a Communist and "under observation all the time he was here."<sup>42</sup> This was also the opinion of the Catholic Church in the mining districts, where even sympathetic clergy at the time of the 1947 strike were certain, as Peter Ludlow puts it, "that the leaders of those miners were communists (especially, so the priests argued, the researcher C. B. Wade)."<sup>43</sup>

Although no individual surveillance file was located, there were references to Wade in more general intelligence reports on "communist" or "subversive" activities in District 26.<sup>44</sup> In retrospect, they seem scanty. No notice was taken of his appointment, and his name does not seem to appear until February 1945, when Communist organizers from Halifax arrived to discourage the union from going out on a wartime strike. After the 1947 strike, Wade attracted more attention. In March 1948, a Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) officer in Glace Bay stated that he was having "increasing influence" with the union leadership but that "thus far Wade has stuck to straight Trade Union and Worker-Political subjects, with no mention of Communism." Shortly after that, "Professor Wade" was identified in a police report as a member of the LPP and described as "the intellectual force behind the Union." A rumour that attempts would be made to have him removed from office at the union convention in August 1948 proved exaggerated. President Jenkins assured delegates that Wade was a valued employee and that there had been no criticism of him from the executive board.<sup>45</sup>

Things changed on the morning of Saturday, 20 May 1950, when Jenkins called Wade into his office and asked for his resignation. When Wade refused, Jenkins told him that he was dismissed, effective immediately. Within hours, his office door was padlocked. A Canadian Press dispatch went out across the country, stating that Jenkins had said the dismissal was "part of a show-down for the removal of Communist influence," although Jenkins later denied making any statement to the press.<sup>46</sup> At UMW headquarters in Washington, secretary treasurer Thomas L. Kennedy made a handwritten note: "Wade is supposed to be a Communist or fellow traveller. Jenkins told me over the phone last Friday that he fired him. He should have done it a long time ago."<sup>47</sup>

When the district executive board met a few days later, Vice-President Ling introduced a motion calling for Wade to be reinstated. For his part, Jenkins claimed that "he never found fault with Jim Wade's work" and that he defended him at conventions and before the international union: "I always stood up for him as long as he was keeping with the organization." Ling then

revised his motion to state that “because this Board has no knowledge of any activities on the part of C. B. Wade detrimental to the interest of UMW of A, the Board disapprove of his dismissal and ask for his re-instatement.” Jenkins added that he could not say that Wade was a Communist, but he said, “I have lost confidence in him and I know that he was not working in the interest of the Union.” Nonetheless, Ling’s motion was adopted by a vote of seven to two.<sup>48</sup>

As Michael Earle has noted, “blatant red-baiting” had not been popular among the coal miners, but Jenkins was clearly feeling the pressure of the deepening Cold War, which was coming to full force with the expulsion of several left-led unions from the Trades and Labour Congress and the Canadian Congress of Labour. The most dramatic example came in the spring of 1949, when the striking “Communist-dominated” Canadian Seamen’s Union (CSU) was broken by the collaboration of shipping companies and government authorities and replaced by the Seafarers’ International Union (SIU). When DOSCO ore carriers arrived at the Sydney steel plant with “scab” SIU crews, union solidarities were severely tested. District 26 had already donated \$1,000 to the CSU, and the secretary treasurer, Adam Scott, went on local radio to denounce the SIU crews as strikebreakers. There were tense scenes at the docks until the leader of the steelworkers union local, under pressure from union headquarters, announced that they would not interfere with the unloading of the ships.<sup>49</sup> With Jenkins reluctant to support the CSU, his credentials as a militant leader were in question. This, in turn, encouraged former AMW secretary treasurer Robert Stewart to challenge Jenkins for the presidency, as he had also done in 1946.<sup>50</sup>

This was the immediate context for Wade’s removal. Jenkins had come to office “from the pits” with a reputation as “a fighter,” Wade recalled, but “his position got to him, as happens often with union leaders.” Wade was not alone in believing that his dismissal was part of a deal by Jenkins to win support from the Catholic Church in return for getting rid of the alleged “red” in his office.<sup>51</sup> Was Jenkins further provoked by word of the discussions at a meeting on 14 May, where Cape Breton LPP members gathered to hear the visiting A. A. MacLeod discuss the situation? According to the police report of the meeting, MacLeod told members that the party wanted to see Jenkins defeated and replaced by Stewart.<sup>52</sup> The announcement of Wade’s removal was followed the next day by the declaration that Stewart was not eligible for office, and in this, Jenkins was supported by the UMW international office.<sup>53</sup>

After the district board called for his reinstatement, Wade appealed to the union membership. His dismissal, he said, was contrary to the district constitution, which stated that suspensions were subject to approval by the executive board. Jenkins was attempting to use charges against him, said Wade, in order to demonstrate that he was sufficiently “anti-red” to continue in office as president.<sup>54</sup> Meanwhile, in *Steelworker and Miner*, the local weekly edited by M. A. Mackenzie, Wade was described as “a modest self-effacing man whose sole desire was to serve the union and its members well.” Now he was the victim of Jenkins’s unscrupulous wishes to advance his ambitions by repudiating “the man who has literally carried Jenkins on his back for the past five years, the man who wrote every speech Jenkins ever delivered, who prepared all the able briefs presented in the name of the union to governments and other public bodies.”<sup>55</sup>

Still, the damage was done. Jenkins was returned to office unopposed, and the June election saw several leaders associated with the left go down to defeat. The *Sydney Post-Record* described the results as a victory for “safe and sane and responsible leadership.”<sup>56</sup> The Wade case did not go away, however, and was still on the agenda when the executive board met in September. The union’s solicitor, Louis Dubinsky, explained that Wade’s lawyer had already secured a writ for payment of wages and had initiated a suit for reinstatement and damages of \$10,000. After further consultations, Wade agreed to submit his resignation and accept a cheque of \$1,050 for three months’ pay.<sup>57</sup>

With Wade’s departure, a page was turning. Nonetheless, the union’s need for a research director had been established. Wade’s successor, James Morrison, held degrees in English and economics from Acadia University. Moreover, as the son of the former District 26 president D. W. Morrison, he must have been considered a politically reliable choice for the deradicalization and normalization of labour relations in the 1950s.<sup>58</sup>

## The History

Meanwhile, there was the “History of District 26,” literally left behind in Wade’s locked office. At the time of his dismissal, Wade identified the manuscript as one of his major accomplishments: “The first history ever written of any Canadian trade union.”<sup>59</sup> The project may have had its genesis in 1945, when Cohen asked Wade to prepare “a very careful historical account” on industrial relations for the use of the royal commission, but neither he nor

Cohen was pleased with the result.<sup>60</sup> By early 1950, Wade was more satisfied, and his research was attracting wider interest.<sup>61</sup> The pending completion of the manuscript is confirmed by a letter in early 1950 from the steel union veteran Forman Wayne, who read the manuscript and returned it with several notes.<sup>62</sup>

As we have it, the “History of District 26” is not in final form. There are references to an introduction, bibliography, and appendices that do not appear in known versions. The surviving manuscript, about three hundred pages in length, consists of twelve well-developed and footnoted chapters covering the history of District 26 from 1919 to 1941.<sup>63</sup> The dates are a little misleading, as by the bottom of the first page of the first chapter, “1919: Recognition,” we are already circling back to a discussion of the early origins. The chapter uses a methodical approach: a central question—namely, the recognition of the UMW in 1919—followed by an account of the events leading to that outcome and an analysis of the implications. Buried in the middle of the chapter is an articulate statement of the purposes of writing this kind of people’s history:

The heroes in our history books are nearly always the generals, the “empire builders,” the industrialists and the politicians who associated with them. No one would wish to deny to some of these an honourable place in our history. But in the coal towns of Nova Scotia, as in scores of other industrial towns in Canada, there have lived and died thousands of union men and women who have shown courage and made sacrifices far greater than many of our history book heroes were ever capable of.<sup>64</sup>

The chapters continue more or less in the same mode: a major development explained through an elaboration of context and story. “Top Wages in 1921” is followed by “1922 Wage Cuts: Slow-Down and Strike,” “1923: Steel-Coal Strike,” “1924 Strike and Restoration of Autonomy,” and “1925: One Hundred and Fifty-Five Days on Strike.” A long chapter (“1925–1926”) on the Royal Commission on Coal chaired by Sir Andrew Rae Duncan slows down the narrative to explore several issues, including the checkoff, company stores, housing, relief societies and workers’ compensation, and safety in the mines, all of which are traced back into the nineteenth century. The narrative resumes with the crises of the early 1930s and the rivalry between District 26 and a new AMW. Other developments of the decade are covered in a chapter on Sydney Mines and Stellarton. Another traces the story of the union in the New Brunswick coalfield down to 1938, although recognition was not achieved

until several years after that. The last chapter introduces the years of wartime mobilization and labour regulation.

By any standard, the “History of District 26” was a substantial achievement, written with a level of authority and commitment that seems to have been characteristic of the man. There was only a limited amount of published work for him to use, and Wade’s treatment goes well beyond what was available.<sup>65</sup> His research drew on the sources at district headquarters—union files, newspaper clippings, and government documents and reports, including the extensive evidence from the hearings of the 1925 Duncan Commission. And Wade also absorbed details of local history from the union veterans with whom he worked.<sup>66</sup>

The quality of research and analysis is evident in his account of the chain of events leading to the shooting of William Davis on 11 June. The confrontation is placed in context, and the lasting historical significance of the 1925 strike is also underlined. Wade stresses the fact that by early June, the strike was at a critical point and that the union leadership had decided to adopt more aggressive picketing. This led to the shutdown of the power plant at Waterford Lake and the loss of power to the mines and the town of New Waterford. This development is sometimes described incorrectly as an attempt by the company to intimidate the coal miners by cutting off the town’s water supply. But on 11 June, the coal miners were attempting not to restore water and power service but to maintain the 100 percent picketing that would prevent the company from trying to resume operations.

For the events of that day, Wade relied especially on two of the board members with whom he worked, Thomas Ling (a “leader of the affair”) and Douglas MacDonald (a “witness”). They provided details that could come only from those with first-hand knowledge—pickets sleeping on a rainy night under shelters built of railway ties and a train loaded with company police and officials advancing slowly toward the plant, removing obstructions from the track as they proceeded. After the force of police and officials recaptured the power plant from the union pickets that morning, they rode into town on horseback, parading on Plummer Avenue to boast of their victory. Then came the legendary march of some eight hundred strikers through the woods to the power plant. When the coal miners were met by gunfire, they retaliated with sticks, stones, and bare hands. After the shooting subsided, the miners managed to rout the police, pulling them off horses, chasing them into the woods, and marching captives back into town. In the course of the mayhem,

coal miner William Davis was shot and killed by a police bullet, and two other men, Gilbert Watson and Jack MacQuarrie, were wounded, casualties of a struggle to defend their strike.<sup>67</sup>

Wade also brought his understanding of industrial relations to bear on the larger situation. He introduced the 1925 strike as an example of “how in some circumstances the employer’s position is so strong that he can force a union into a strike.” Attempts at negotiation and conciliation had failed, in part due to uncertainty about the status of the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act after a ruling of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council was announced in January.<sup>68</sup> The strike started in March, after the company reduced operations and cut off credit at company stores. “Let them stay out two months or six months, it matters not; eventually they will have to come to us,” BESCO vice-president J. E. McLurg famously told a reporter. His offhand remark—“They can’t stand the gaff”—conveyed the company attitude. Almost at once, “standing the gaff” became a rallying cry for the strike: “There is not a miner who has forgotten it. They ‘stood the gaff’ for one hundred and fifty-five days.”<sup>69</sup>

By May the hard-pressed union leadership was prepared to accept an arbitrated settlement, but the company was now refusing to deal with the UMW at all. This impasse was broken by the events at Waterford Lake—an outcome reinforced by the looting and burning of company stores, the return of troops to the coalfield, the defeat of the provincial government, a temporary settlement, and the appointment of a royal commission. Wade concludes that the strike had failed in its main objective: “Basically the strike was lost because people were poverty stricken and they were hungry and terribly tired. In other words, BESCO was willing and able to starve the men and their families into submission and the union was unable to prevent this.” And yet there was also an achievement worth underlining: “The strike was lost in terms of the immediate issue; it was won, in terms of establishing the union: after 1925 all serious efforts to destroy the union were abandoned.”<sup>70</sup> From this perspective, the “reluctant recognition” of 1919 was superseded by a more permanent commitment, supported by the province, to the preservation of union recognition and collective bargaining in the coal industry. As Wade’s analysis makes clear, this was understood as a necessary compromise that anticipated the state-supported formula of industrial legality that would be more widely adopted across Canada in the 1940s.

There is much more to appreciate in the manuscript. Wade’s training equipped him to analyze changes in wages, prices, and profits that were at



stake in disputes of the past as well as in his own time, and his familiarity with corporate behaviour was useful in understanding the strategies followed by the coal companies. Discussing contract proposals at one stage in the 1920s, for instance, Wade explained the situation in these terms: “The familiar argument, used so persistently over the years by BESCO (and afterwards by DOSCO), is merely a demand that the workers submit themselves to the ungovernable forces of capitalism; that they permit their wage rates to fluctuate with and be determined by the profit needs and expectations of their employers.”<sup>71</sup> Similarly, in a later chapter, he brought a critical eye to the history of government intervention: “At least so far as the miner is concerned, all the thirty odd boards and commissions that had dealt with his wages and working conditions from 1907 to 1943, had based their findings on the same principle; wages must be determined, no matter how great the miner’s need, by the ability to pay of the individual firm involved.”<sup>72</sup> His discussion of social conditions noted too that wealth tended to concentrate far from the resource hinterlands, leaving the coal districts with few resources for social improvements: “Wealthy Canadians tend to congregate in Central Canada and pay their local taxes there no matter how much of their wealth may have been extracted from East or West.”<sup>73</sup> From this perspective, the history of the union to date was a long preparation for the transition to a more responsible economics of remuneration and reinvestment based on public ownership of the industry.<sup>74</sup>

There are not many large generalizations in the manuscript, but the author knew that the “History of District 26” had a didactic purpose for those who would carry on the work of the union. He encouraged readers to reflect on the underlying differences between radical and moderate leaders who appeared in the pages, represented almost archetypically by J. B. McLachlan and Dan Willie Morrison:

The one was guided by the principle: stop fighting only when you must; the other by: never fight until you really must. McLachlan was motivated by the belief that capitalism must be, could be and was going to be, superseded by socialism; Morrison (though no fervent supporter of private enterprise) by the belief capitalism was here to stay, if not for ever, but at any rate for an indefinite period.

It is easy enough for a third party to say that both went too far in their opposite directions. Which was more fundamentally in the right the reader will decide for himself.<sup>75</sup>

In leaving the reader with this challenge, Wade was content to present himself as a witness to the conditions and opportunities of history rather than as an authority on strategies of social change. In this, the director of research and education was deferring to his constituency. It would be up to the miners' union and its members to determine the course of action ahead.

## Epilogue

He waited for me, at the exit from a subway stop in one of the older suburbs in Toronto. He was at the wheel of a small white sports car, a dapper gentleman, relatively short and square-shouldered. He spoke in what we might call a mid-Atlantic accent. We went for lunch, and then to his modest bungalow in Scarborough. When I tried to reach him again, I learned that he had suffered a stroke and passed away, only a few years after my visit.

After he left Glace Bay in 1950, there was no question of Wade returning to Queen's. The family moved to Toronto, where he worked as a chartered accountant and later opened a practice of his own. He continued to do work for unions, but most of his practice consisted of small accounts, and he was known to be generous with his time for people. The family rarely discussed politics, but his daughter recalls that her parents encouraged her to be an independent thinker. Her father invited her to debate propositions such as "From each according to his ability; to each according to his need" and "Is the brotherhood of man really possible in a world of scarcity?"<sup>76</sup>

When I met Wade in the 1970s, I had the powerful impression of a man who had moved on. He had no copy of the District 26 manuscript in his possession and had not been active politically for many years. When I visited him, though, he mentioned that he and his wife, Christine, were planning to attend a new play about the overthrow of the Salvador Allende government in Chile in 1973. Indeed, Christine had a long-time interest in theatre, acting, for instance, in a Chekhov play and later directing an Ibsen production in Toronto's little theatres of the 1950s. In some productions, Wade had small walk-on parts as a butler or servant.<sup>77</sup>

Our reconnaissance ends here, but there is enough evidence to identify the place of C. B. Wade in the history of District 26 and more generally in the field of regional history and labour studies. He emerged as a politically engaged intellectual who made common cause with organized labour in the hopeful period of transition from wartime mobilization to postwar reconstruction.

His professional background and his experience with the Workers' Educational Association prepared him to answer the call from District 26, where he became one of the first members of a cohort of union staff across Canada who were navigating the terrain of industrial legality and promoting an expanded definition of working-class citizenship.<sup>78</sup> Wade was also among the small number of researchers who made lasting early contributions to labour studies, and his historical work can be associated with the activists of the 1940s who were discussing the need for a "people's history" of Canada.<sup>79</sup> Once on the ground in Glace Bay, Wade was energized by the militancy of the coal miners. His responsibilities as research director were always pressing, but he understood that the coal miners saw their history as a necessary explanation of the origins of current conditions. Consequently, he applied his skills to documenting the contradictions between economic exploitation and social progress that were so visibly demonstrated in the history of the coal miners. And in step with union policy and dominant thinking on the left, he promoted solutions based on collective bargaining and social planning.

To be sure, Wade was writing his political economy and labour history at a time when coal remained the leading source of energy in Canada. The coal miners believed they were well placed to protect the stability of the industry and their communities and the future of the province and region. As a labour intellectual, Wade was participating in a long war of position, readying union members and the public for a better world to come. By the end of the 1940s, however, Cold War conditions encouraged unions to set aside, if not repudiate, the more radical implications of their own history and seek a favourable accommodation with capital and the state, and Wade fell victim to the associated internal politics of the miners' union.<sup>80</sup> Soon it would also be clear that King Coal was being displaced more rapidly than anticipated, and by 1960 the logic of regional underdevelopment led a royal commission to propose an orderly reduction of the industry.<sup>81</sup> It would fall to another generation of activists and intellectuals, and even the next wave of historians, to respond to the conundrums of capitalism and underdevelopment in the region. For the time being, the dominant culture of modernist industrial capitalism prevailed, and the people and communities called into service for the production of industrial energy were considered increasingly redundant. Given the legacy of residual and oppositional traditions, however, there would continue to be resistance, and with it a search for alternative strategies of development.<sup>82</sup>

## Notes

This chapter first appeared in *Labour/Le Travail* 79 (2017). It is reprinted here in revised form with permission.

1. Logan, *Trade Unions in Canada*, 605–6. Logan identified five union research directors in Canada, all named since 1942, as well as the appointment of Eugene Forsey at the Canadian Congress of Labour. For an extended version of the present chapter, see the journal *Labour/Le Travail* 79 (Spring 2017): 9–52.
2. Wade's influence on local labour history was acknowledged in the wave of publications that began to appear in the 1970s. Paul MacEwan drew on the manuscript for columns on local history in the *Cape Breton Highlander* (1965–69) and named it a major source for his book, *Miners and Steelworkers: Labour in Cape Breton*.
3. See Cuthbertson, *Labour Goes to War*. The new industrial unions often placed a priority on public relations staff, journalists, researchers, and educators as part of a larger strategy of “unionizing” as well as “organizing” members and influencing the larger working-class public.
4. On the transition to a new order in labour relations, see McInnis, *Harnessing Labour Confrontation*. As McInnis shows, labour leaders narrowed their agenda at this time in order to achieve the stabilities of industrial legality, a self-limiting trend that was accelerated by the anti-communism of the period.
5. Biographical information on C. B. Wade (1906–82) is drawn from an interview with his daughter, Martha Wall, 24 July 2015, as well as this author's earlier discussion with Wade himself, 23 December 1974. I am grateful for information shared, 4 April 2016, by Peter F. Wade, whose father was the uncle referred to here. Additional details on family history were provided by Peter Backman, 2 and 5 June 2016.
6. Before moving to Kingston in 1933, Wade married Laura Christine Hugill. Her abilities and perseverance had brought her to the University of Toronto, where she recalled being in classes with Northrop Frye. Both Christine and C. B. came from relatively unorthodox religious backgrounds: Christine's family members were Plymouth Brethren, and C. B.'s family members were Swedenborgians; however, their daughter recalls her parents as confirmed atheists. Wall, interview by author, 2015.
7. These appeared in issues of *Canadian Chartered Accountant*: February 1941, 98–108; August 1942, 86–88; and January 1943, 66–70.
8. Radforth and Sangster, “Link between Labour and Learning,” 41–78. See also their chapter in Welton, *Knowledge for the People*.

9. Drummond Wren to Idele Wilson, 14 November 1939; Wilson to Wren, 3 April 1940; file 84, MU4030, fond F1217, Workers' Educational Association Fonds (WEA Fonds), Archives of Ontario (AO), Toronto, Ontario.
10. Wren to Wade, 10 October 1941; Wade to Wren, 15 December 1941; file 85, MU4030, WEA Fonds, AO.
11. On Wilson, see Guard, "'Woman Question' in Canadian Unionism," esp. 185–88. Wilson's publications included pamphlets such as *Citizen Trade Unionist*.
12. Wade, interview by author, 1974; Wall, interview by author, 2015.
13. Earle, "Down with Hitler and Silby Barrett," 56–90. See also Earle, "Coalminers and Their 'Red' Union," 99–138. The miners' rebellion also increased support for the political left at a time when the Communists endorsed CCF candidates in return for their support for labour militancy. CCF MLAs were elected in Glace Bay, Sydney, and New Waterford in 1941. The coal miner Clarie Gillis, a former AMW member, was elected to Parliament in 1940 for the CCF and continued to serve until 1957.
14. Forsey, *Life on the Fringe*, 76–77.
15. For the union submission of 15 November 1943 to the National War Labour Board, see "DOSCO—Miscellaneous," vol. 10, part 3, MG30 A25, Eugene Forsey Fonds, Library and Archives Canada (LAC). His preliminary notes included a stronger statement of the case for public ownership: "If the people of Canada are to go on providing public money to assist this enterprise, isn't it time they took it over and ran it for the benefit of the workers in it and of the community generally?"
16. Wren to Jenkins, 20 April 1944; Jenkins to Wren, 23 April 1944, file 10.48, MU4011; Wren to Wade, 29 April 1944, file 85, MU4030, WEA Fonds, AO.
17. Wade, interview by author, 1974. MacLeod came to prominence as the organizer of the Canadian League against War and Fascism in 1934. In 1943, he was elected to the provincial legislature in Ontario, where he served two terms. He had worked on the steel plant at Sydney Mines in his youth and was well regarded by the leftists in District 26 and other local unions.
18. "Notes for Report to Board, September 16/47," reel #10027, series #1134, United Mine Workers of America, District 26, Public Archives of Nova Scotia (PANS), Halifax, Nova Scotia.
19. A. J. Moore to Wade, 7 September 1945, Reel #10023, PANS.
20. See, for instance, district executive board minutes, 8 January 1948, MS 9.32, UMWA no. 4514 Papers, Dalhousie University Archives (DUA), Halifax, Nova Scotia. For a discussion of the newspaper, see Earle, "People's Daily Paper," 63–81.
21. *Sydney Post-Record*, 30 May 1950.

22. The royal commission was announced in March 1944, and the report was tabled in January 1947. See *Report of the Royal Commission on Coal, 1946* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1947).
23. Jenkins et al. to Coal Commission, 16 January 1945, with document, Reel #10023, PANS.
24. The reference is to the British Empire Steel Corporation. See Frank, "Cape Breton Coal Industry," 3–34, which is helpful in explaining the corporate history of the industry and the origins of Dominion Steel and Coal in 1928.
25. Wade to J. L. Cohen, 12, 16, 26 March 1945, Reel #10024, PANS.
26. Adam Scott to Cohen, 25 June 1945; Cohen to Wade, 11 July 1945; W. R. Dymond to Cohen, 26 July 1945, file 3120, vol. 40, Cohen Fonds, LAC. See MacDowell, *Renegade Lawyer*, 203–4, 269, and chap. 8 generally.
27. *Glace Bay Gazette*, 13–14 September 1945. The headline in the *Gazette* underlined the union's main message: "UMW Coal Brief Recommends Nationalization of Industry."
28. United Mine Workers of America, *Submission to the Royal Commission on Coal*. The summary here draws on MacIsaac, "Coal Miners on Strike," chap. 1, esp. 14–23. The plan for nationalization attracted a vigorous cross-examination of Wade by DOSCO's long-time general counsel, Lionel Forsyth, who later became president of the corporation. See testimony, 13 September 1945, Royal Commission on Coal, RG33–63, vol. 37, file 40, LAC, 3556–653.
29. MacIsaac, "Coal Miners on Strike," 47. The royal commission report aggravated the union's discontent, as only limited government intervention was proposed. Wade's response repeated the argument that a full programme of modernization and social reform could be achieved only under a national fuel policy supported by public ownership. See Wade, "Coal Should Be Public Utility," 334–43.
30. "Notes for Report to Board, September 16/47." In one initiative, the union invited a Toronto graphic artist to visit the mining district. In addition to several cartoons, he drew human-interest views of the social landscape. Some sketches appeared in the *Glace Bay Gazette*, 23 May 1947. Four lithographs based on this work were included in a folio published in 1952. See Frank, "Looking for Avrom Yanovsky," 37.
31. Wade, *Robbing the Mines*.
32. *Glace Bay Gazette*, 31 May 1947, as quoted by MacIsaac, "Coal Miners on Strike," 75.
33. MacIsaac, "Coal Miners on Strike," 78.
34. *Glace Bay Gazette*, 10 May 1947; 30–31 March 1948. The act was notable for excluding fishermen from the category of "employees" at a time when

- the Canadian Fishermen's Union was engaged in a struggle for collective bargaining. See the chapters by Abbott, "Coal Miners and the Law," and Nisbet, "Free Enterprise at Its Best," 24–46, 170–90.
35. C. B. Wade, "The Unorganized in Nova Scotia," July 1947, Reel #10027, PANS.
  36. C. D. Howe to Jenkins, 21 September 1948, and additional documents in this file, MG19.6, E1, Beaton Institute, Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS.
  37. C. B. Wade, "Centralization and Unemployment" column, *Glace Bay Gazette*, n.d., Reel#10027, PANS.
  38. Wade (emphasis in original).
  39. Wade.
  40. "Radio Script," 1948, MG19.6, E2, Beaton Institute, Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS.
  41. See President's Correspondence 1944/1945, United Mine Workers of America Archives, formerly in Washington, DC, now at the Special Collections Library, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA.
  42. Ernest Beaton interview, T-159, Beaton Institute, Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS.
  43. Ludlow, *Canny Scot*, 235–38.
  44. "United Mine Workers of America, District 26, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, Communist Activities Within," file A-2006-00529, RG146, Canadian Security Intelligence Service Records, LAC (hereafter RCMP file). The material was released following an access to information request. After an appeal to the information commissioner, a second release with additional material followed in 2015. Internal evidence indicates there was a separate file on Wade, but it is believed to have been destroyed.
  45. Reports in RCMP file, 22 September 1945, 4 December 1946, 22 March 1948, 31 March 1948; clipping, *Sydney Post-Record*, 4 September 1948. There was an attack on Wade at the district convention in 1946, but a motion of confidence was adopted, with Jenkins's support.
  46. *Globe and Mail*, 22 May 1950; *Sydney Post-Record*, 22 May 1950.
  47. President's Office—Correspondence, District 26 1950/1951, UMWA Archives.
  48. District executive board minutes, 26 May 1950, DUA. The UMW had long maintained an anti-communist clause in its constitution, but it was not enforced with any consistency during the CIO period. Moreover, Robert Stewart and other leftists often described themselves as agreeing with the LPP on many issues without being members or accepting party discipline.
  49. Earle, "Cold War in Cape Breton."
  50. There was a complication in early 1950, when Stewart led a two-day walkout at the mine where he worked. This gave DOSCO grounds to terminate his

employment, but Stewart was careful to maintain his union membership while the decision was under appeal.

51. Wade, interview by author, 1974.
52. Report on meeting of 19 May 1950, RCMP file. Wade was not listed among those in attendance.
53. District executive board minutes, 26 May 1950.
54. "Statement Issued by C. B. Wade," 30 May 1950, RCMP file.
55. *Steelworker and Miner*, 27 May 1950.
56. *Sydney Post-Record*, 15 June 1950.
57. District executive board minutes, 1–2 September 1950, Reel #10024, PANS.
58. Morrison's 1950 Acadia University MA thesis in economics was titled "A History of Labor [*sic*] Management in the Coal Mining Industry of Nova Scotia." The bibliography cited an interview with Jenkins dated 26 May 1950, which apparently took place in the midst of the controversy over Wade's dismissal.
59. "Statement Issued by C. B. Wade," 30 May 1950, RCMP file. The claim that there were no previous histories of individual unions may, like all historical "firsts," be difficult to establish.
60. Cohen to Wade, 12 May 1945; Wade to Cohen, 12 October 1945; Cohen to Wade, 17 October 1945; with "Notes on Relations between the Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation and the Coal Miners," file 3120, vol. 40, Cohen Fonds, LAC.
61. The programme for the Maritime Labour Institute at Dalhousie University in May 1950 included a lecture by Wade on the union's history. Events intervened, and the lecture was not delivered. Report, 21 June 1950, RCMP file.
62. Waye suggested a parallel between the events of 1923 and a famous episode in English history, in 1381, Wat Tyler's rebellion. See Waye to Wade, 16 February 1950, Reel #10032, PANS.
63. The status of the text has been unstable. Over the years, this researcher has reviewed five typed copies of the manuscript. For a detailed discussion, see the extended version of this chapter in *Labour/Le Travail* 79 (Spring 2017): 42–44. The citations below are to the "Beaton" and "Fergusson/ Morrison" copies. The first is at the Beaton Institute in "C. B. Wade 1950," MG19.16, file 2; the second is in the PANS library as HD8039 M879.
64. Wade, "History of District 26," chap. 1, 17. Wade's statement is repeated, without attribution, in MacEwan, *Miners and Steelworkers*, ix–x.
65. An incomplete version of Eugene Forsey's MA thesis was published as "Economic and Social Aspects of the Nova Scotia Coal Industry." See also Logan, *History of Trade-Union Organization*, chap. 3 and 143–48. Internal evidence indicates that Logan's research was completed in 1924.



66. He was also influenced by McAlister Coleman's *Men and Coal*, a sympathetic journalistic account of the United Mine Workers of America.
67. Wade, "History of District 26," chap. 6 and esp. 12–16. The most reliable brief account is Don MacGillivray's biography of William Davis in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, accessed 17 January 2024, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/davis\\_william\\_15E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/davis_william_15E.html). See also MacKinnon, "Labour Landmarks in New Waterford," esp. 13–20.
68. The Privy Council's decision reinforced the trend toward "industrial voluntarism." See Fudge and Tucker, *Labour before the Law*, 140–41.
69. Wade, "History of District 26," chap. 6, 10–12.
70. Wade, chap. 6, 30.
71. Wade, chap. 5, 5.
72. Wade, chap. 11, 3, 97.
73. Wade, chap. 7, 30.
74. The Labour government in Britain adopted a Coal Industry Nationalisation Act in 1946, and the mines were transferred to public ownership on 1 January 1947. Public ownership of coal was also the policy of the CCF and the LPP, who, despite their rivalries, shared the same state-planning approach to natural resources and a gradualist transition to some form of socialism.
75. Wade, "History of District 26," chap. 4, 25–26. On McLachlan, see Frank, *J. B. McLachlan*.
76. Wade, interview by author, 1974.
77. Wade, interview.
78. On the expanding role of the research director, see Levine, "Economic Research in Labour Unions," 49–64; and Stinson, "Tribute to Gil Levine," 173–87.
79. Kealey, *Workers and Canadian History*, chaps. 1–3, including the discussion at 71–75 of the "people's history" initiatives. There is no evidence that Wade participated in those discussions.
80. Unions across the country purged staff, and the labour centrals expelled "red-led" unions. See Whitaker and Marcuse, *Cold War Canada*, chaps. 14 and 15.
81. *Report of the Royal Commission on Coal*. In 1950 the coal miners in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick produced more than seven million tons of coal, about 37 percent of the country's production at a time when coal, both domestic and imported, was the predominant energy source. Although Canadian coal was always in a weak position in Central Canada, the coal miners believed that a national fuel policy would bring stability to the industry. However, the production levels of 1950 fell rapidly in the next

decade as hydroelectricity, oil, and gas replaced coal as the principal sources of energy in Canada.

82. See Parnaby, "Roots, Region, and Resistance," 5–31; MacKinnon, *Closing SYSCO*.

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## 7 “Everybody Was Crying”

### Ella Barron, Dutch War Bride in Amsterdam and Ingonish, Cape Breton, 1923–2023

*Ken Donovan*

To mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the beginning of World War II in 2014, dozens of books and hundreds and hundreds of articles were written about war brides who came to Canada and the United States. This chapter, contributing to a larger historiographical effort, examines the life of Ella Barron, one of forty-eight thousand war brides who immigrated to Canada during and after the end of World War II.<sup>1</sup> Between 1942 and 1952, there were approximately one million war brides who arrived in Canada and the United States. Ella’s story, recounted here, is part of a more ambitious narrative about the history of rural war brides’ experiences in North America.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, as a contribution to a collection that examines Cape Breton in the long twentieth century, the story of Ella Barron reveals the transnational aspects of immigration to the rural parts of the island in the wake of global conflict and reflects the profound implications of those experiences on one remarkable woman’s life.

A native of Amsterdam, Cornelia Aletta Anna Iske, known as Nellie in Holland and Ella in Canada, was born on 12 December 1923. Coming from a working-class family, she was born in the middle of eleven children in her family. War is a momentous struggle for combatants, but it also poses significant risks and stresses to civilians, especially children and those from the poorest social classes.<sup>3</sup> The formidable German war machine invaded Holland on 10 May 1940, and from then on, Ella and her family struggled to cope with the invasion, their loss of freedom, and the precarity associated with stable

food and shelter. Ella recalled in our oral history interview that “the Germans put us through hell” during the last year of the war.<sup>4</sup>

Five months after hostilities ended in May 1945, Ella met Alex Barron of Ingonish, and they were married in Amsterdam on 24 January 1946. Ella left her home, bound for Canada in May of the same year, and arrived at Pier 21 in Halifax on 15 June.<sup>5</sup> Ella travelled to Ingonish, Cape Breton Island, the next day, and there she would raise her own family of ten children. There were, however, physical and mental difficulties to overcome. Ella spoke Dutch, and she was a Protestant in a Roman Catholic community. She only had rudimentary cooking skills; she did not know, for instance, how to bake bread. Ella was also a young, urban woman who had to adjust to living in an isolated, country village.

This chapter offers an analytical approach to Ella’s life in the Netherlands and in Canada. Intersecting with the other chapters in this collection, Ella’s story reveals how movement and migration, the rural and urban divide, and particular cultures and identities were all essential in framing the Cape Breton experience during the long twentieth century. These themes will emerge as the chapter unfolds through one woman’s view of living through war in Holland and peace in postwar Canada. Her experiences were relayed in primary interviews, conducted with Ella and recorded by the author, on 30 June and 1 July 2008, and another interview on 21 January 2020. There was an additional interview on 2 January 2016, which was not digitally recorded but was recorded by the author through contemporaneous notes. The three digitally recorded interviews are deposited at the Beaton Institute Archives at Cape Breton University.

## **Life in Holland, 1923 to 1939**

Ella, the daughter of Christaan Iske and Geraldina Geel, grew up with little money. Family life was difficult, especially during the years of the Great Depression, a worldwide economic downturn that began in 1929 and lasted until the late 1930s. To make matters worse, two of Ella’s siblings died in childhood. Fritz, a twin brother, died one day after he was born in 1928. Crib death, the sudden and unexplained death of an infant, is often associated with difficult living conditions. Modern medicine has reduced the incidence of crib death, but it remains a complicated health issue.<sup>6</sup> In 1934 another brother, five-year-old Adrian, died after he fell out of his crib. The child was taken

to the hospital but did not survive the subsequent operation. One can imagine the grief felt by Ella and her family, but for her parents, there was little time to express their grief over the death of the boys—after all, there were other children to feed, clothe, and comfort. To this day, ninety-nine-year-old Ella vividly recalls the death of her dear brothers, a testimony to her love of family.

Ella's dad, Christaan, worked as a truck driver and had to be away most of the time in order to make a living. "It was hard on the whole family," Ella recalled. She noted that her family life was difficult. Ella's mother, Geraldina, stayed home and looked after the children. At twelve years of age, Ella went to a home economics school in Amsterdam, which she attended from 1935 to 1936 and where she learned to cook, sew, and iron clothes. Ella, however, did not like the school. "They tormented me because I was poor and I did not always dress properly. We were left out of things because we were poor."<sup>7</sup> Thinking back on her experience, she reflected, "Sometimes, they treated us nice, sometimes not." Ella left the school in 1936 after completing only one year of a two-year program.

After returning home for a brief period, Ella "started out on her own."<sup>8</sup> In 1937, she moved to Hilversum, twenty kilometres away, to work in a home for children, a day school in which girls and a few boys came from single-parent, widowed, or divorced families with working parents. Located at Eik Bosser Wegt, the school was housed in an attractive building that was still standing in 1977 when Ella visited on one of her return trips to the Netherlands.<sup>9</sup> The children came to the school during the day and returned to their homes at night. There were twenty-four children, mostly girls, who attended the school, twelve on each side of the house. Ella has pictures of the house with herself and sixteen of the children. The children, standing on two large wooden swing chairs, supported in the middle by a grand central pole, looked happy and carefree. Ella did not look much older than the students.

Ella and another teenager lived with twelve of the girls on one side of the duplex and helped care for the children. In the other half of the house, there were two girls who helped care for the children on their side of the duplex. Besides the caretakers such as Ella, there were teachers who taught the children their school work. The school, owned by an elderly Jewish couple, hired Kate, a middle-aged woman who lived in a nearby house, to supervise the school. Although not paid, Ella worked full time at the school in exchange for room and board. Preparing meals, doing laundry, scrubbing floors, weeding

the gardens, and attending to the needs of the children were demanding chores. Every Monday Ella had to wash the clothes, and it took her all day to finish the task. Spinach was a key part of the diet at the school; Ella had to clean the greens in a big wash tub, part of cooking for the children.

Sometimes people brought in clothing for Ella and her coworkers. There was a seamstress who worked at the house, and she made two blue dresses for Ella, but they were hardly flattering. Ella felt shamed because “they looked like potato bags”; they had no shape. Throughout her life, Ella was conscious of growing up poor and her subsequent demeaning treatment: “I did not like it.”<sup>10</sup> Children quickly become aware of their status and how they fit into the social order in any society when they are coming of age.<sup>11</sup>

## Germans Invade Holland, 10 May 1940

At six o'clock in the morning of 10 May 1940, Ella came downstairs in the boarding school as usual to make a pot of porridge for the twenty-four girls who attended the day school. The morning was hardly typical because it changed Ella's life. Kate, the school supervisor, came in and stated that Germany had invaded Holland. “I was scared,” recalled Ella. “It was something I didn't expect. That morning, we all got together in the hallway, and it was the last day we sang the Dutch national anthem. Everybody was crying.”<sup>12</sup> Ella remembered that hallway only too well because she had to scrub it each day. “We were looking after the children, cooking, cleaning, and washing their clothes.”

Ella was only seventeen when the expansionism of Nazi Germany transformed into a broader European conflict. After their occupation of Amsterdam, the Nazis made plans to gather all the Jewish people for slave labour and eventual transport to concentration camps as part of the Holocaust. Jewish people in Ella's neighbourhood, as required by the Nazi Party, had to wear the Star of David, a yellow patch, symbolizing their identification as Jews.<sup>13</sup> The wearing of the Star of David to isolate Jews had been introduced throughout Nazi-occupied Europe in August 1941.<sup>14</sup> The Jewish owners of the day school, knowing that they were in danger, took in three young Jewish sisters into the school in late 1941. Ella has a picture of Jatte, Greejte, and Maviejtie Sevison. Sitting on the steps of the school overlooking the garden, the beautiful children, ranging in age from four to eight years, were well dressed and healthy. Jatte had a coat over her dress, whereas baby Greejte had mittens,



and they all wore hats with warm-looking dresses.<sup>15</sup> The children, however, were eventually taken by the Nazis, as were the Jewish owners of the boarding school. One day, the elderly Jewish couple were there, and then they were gone. Ella “never saw or heard of them again.”<sup>16</sup>

## Amsterdam during the Holocaust

The Holocaust is well known in the Netherlands, owing in part to the experiences of another young Dutch girl in the capital city of Amsterdam.<sup>17</sup> Anne Frank, like Ella, was a native of Amsterdam and became internationally renowned in the decades following her murder in the death camps. On 1 September 1939, when Anne Frank was ten years old, Nazi Germany invaded Poland, and so World War II began. Not long after, in May 1940, the Nazis also invaded the Netherlands.<sup>18</sup>

Five days later, the Dutch army surrendered. It had little or no chance of success against the German blitzkrieg. Two of Ella’s brothers served in the Dutch army, and they fought against the Germans during the conflict. Ella’s oldest brother, Chris (1912–2008), was wounded, but her other brother, Piet, survived uninjured.<sup>19</sup> Slowly but surely, the Nazis introduced laws and regulations that made Jewish life unbearable. Jewish residents counted for nothing under the new discriminatory laws.<sup>20</sup> Jews could no longer go to the movies, visit parks, or buy goods at non-Jewish shops. The rules meant that more and more places became off limits. Anne’s father had to give up his company because Jews were no longer allowed to run their own businesses. Jewish children had to go to separate schools. By the spring of 1942, Anne’s father had started furnishing a hiding place in an extension to his former business quarters at Prinsengracht 263. He was helped by some friends and colleagues, and before long, four more individuals wanted protection. The hiding place was crowded, but Anne remained silent, fearful, and vigilant.<sup>21</sup>

After the Germans took over the secret annex of the Anne Frank House on 4 August 1944, the eight Jewish people in hiding were transported to the Netherlands transit camp at Westerbok, and then the Frank family was sent by train to Auschwitz on 3 September 1944. More than one hundred thousand Jewish people from the Netherlands had already been sent to the concentration and extermination camps of Auschwitz and Sobibor.<sup>22</sup> The Netherlands had the greatest number of Jewish victims in Western Europe in terms of percentages and absolute numbers. Approximately 75 percent of the 140,000

Jews in the country (104,000) were sent to the concentration camps.<sup>23</sup> Adolph Eichmann, a German high official and one of the key architects of the Holocaust, had organized the deportation of European Jews from his headquarters in Berlin.<sup>24</sup> Such was the context when Ella met Jewish people, including children, in Amsterdam.

In 1944 Ella went back to Amsterdam and worked for the post office delivering mail, as there were few men left in Holland. Many Dutch men found themselves imprisoned, shipped off to Germany for forced labour, or in hiding. Tragedy struck Ella's family on 24 February 1944 when Ella's father died at forty-eight years of age. After the Germans took control of the trucking company that employed her father, he was forced to work alongside the occupying Germans. His job required him to drive a truck to pick up the remains of British airmen at night after they were shot down over Holland. A German soldier travelled with Ella's father during the night. The soldier picked up the remains of the airmen because Ella's father was not permitted to get out of the truck. As a result of this work, Ella's father was seriously affected by a coal-based fuel substitute that the German military had used during the war. Before and during World War II, Germany had developed converted coal as feedstock to establish the world's first successful synthetic liquid fuel industry.<sup>25</sup> Ella believed it was the poisonous fumes from the fuel that contributed to her father's heart failure. Ella, who had always been close to her dad, fondly remembered a cup and saucer that he had given her on her eighteenth birthday. She also recalled delivering mail to his house before he died.<sup>26</sup>

Ella has a striking photo of herself wearing a postal cap and cloak. The stylish cloak, one button secured at the top, is complemented by her cap jauntily tilted to the right with her beautiful smile and curly hair flowing down around her collar. Happiness, though, can be fleeting, especially in occupied countries like Holland. Before a year was over, Ella had quit delivering the mail because her shoes wore out and her feet became sore from walking the streets. Ella's mother, meanwhile, was left with two young children, Adrian and Johanna, as well as her own elderly mother, all occupying a one-room apartment. Ella moved to live with her sister Dien in Amsterdam because she lived closer to the hospital, where Ella had started a new job. Besides, her mother had no room for Ella, even though she helped her mother as best she could with household chores and small tasks.

## Working in the Hospital

After working for the postal service, Ella went to work in a hospital. Ella remembered when she started work there because it was shortly before her dad died on 23 February 1944. Ella boarded with Mrs. Lobbes for five guilders a month in her house at 74, the second Helmerstraat, near the hospital. A lady in her seventies, Mrs. Lobbes had a son who was sick. Operated by the Dutch, the hospital was a microcosm of Dutch life at the time, with one-half of the hospital serving the Germans and the other half the Dutch. The German patients were treated much better than the Dutch. Each morning at 7:00, Ella had to pass a security checkpoint to enter work. Ella worked in the kitchen cleaning vegetables, mostly beets. She also cleaned tulip bulbs, a substitute for potatoes. When cooked, Ella thought the bulbs were “not bad,” but the seeds were bitter. In 1944, Ella recalled, “We saw German boys in the hospital, soldiers fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen years old who were wounded. This was an awful time to go through.”<sup>27</sup>

During the last two years of the war, people in the Netherlands were starving because there was little or no food available. After the invasion of Normandy in June 1944, the Allied powers began to gradually degrade the powerful German war machine in a life-and-death struggle. The Germans, in turn, made life more difficult for Dutch civilians because food resources were devoted to the German military. To survive, Ella had to smuggle food out of the hospital. As she explained, “Sometimes you have to be dishonest.” Ella and three of her friends, who worked with her in the hospital, wore skirts, and they made a small, square bag that they “each wore under their skirts so they could hide tulip bulbs, potatoes, beets, small bottles of yogurt, and other scraps of food.” Ella smuggled food to her mother, her two younger siblings, and her grandmother. She also helped Mrs. Lobbes, who had a sick son. Since Ella and her friends were paid for their work in the hospital, she was able to supplement the smuggled food with bread she purchased on the black market. On 4 May 1945, Ella and her girlfriends were caught “stealing” from the hospital, and they were promptly fired. Ella has a photo of herself and her three friends leaving the hospital and walking in the Dam Square on 4 May 1945. The four young women had broad smiles and a jaunt in their steps as they walked in the spring sunshine. The smiles were a portent of better times ahead.

The evening of the day that Ella was fired from the hospital, she and Mrs. Lobbes heard “an awful racket in the street.” There was a man saying

the war would be over tomorrow. The Germans came outside immediately and started shooting. The war ended the next morning; it was Ella's mom's birthday. Young women who had collaborated with the Germans were marched out into the street, and their heads were shaved. Ella thought that "it was pitiful." The Dutch civilians knew these collaborators. Ella made her feelings clear about the German occupation: "I never wanted anything to do with the Germans. They were our enemies. It was nothing strange to see dead bodies in the street."<sup>28</sup>

The end of the war brought immediate relief in terms of psychological stress. The Allies had gained victory, but it "took an awful long time to get food." The winter of 1944–45 was known as the "Hunger Winter" in Holland.<sup>29</sup> Amsterdam was the last major city in Holland to be liberated: "We were issued rations and food coupons." Ella remembered going to the store and getting canned vegetable soup as part of her rations. "I had never seen it before. I stayed with Mrs. Lobbes, and I made my own meals." Ella became sick because she did not dilute the soup: "My stomach was [too] weak to eat something like that."

After the war was over, the Canadians and the Americans came to the Dam Square on 7 May, the day of the formal German surrender. The Canadians arrived in their tanks. German soldiers were still hiding in buildings in the Dam Square, and they killed many people who were waiting for the Allies. "We bought flowers and presented them to one Canadian soldier. The poor fellow was so surprised, he could say nothing." Ella recalls seeing an airplane flying in distress and on fire, then watching as it crashed into a hotel for Germans. "It did not bother me," she related. Later, upon some reflection, Ella admitted that the plane crash had troubled her. After 7 May, life slowly came back to normal. The nine o'clock curfew was lifted.

## **Ella Meets Alex Barron**

Before long, Ella started going to dances with her first cousin. There was a dance in Amersfoort near Amsterdam in October 1945, where Ella met Alex Barron—her future husband. She recalls going into the dance hall: for Ella, it was resplendent, almost magical: "The tables, decorated with lovely tablecloths, had dishes filled with beautiful fruit. We had not seen fresh fruit, especially in the last year of the war. The hall was full of Canadian soldiers with music and dancing." Ella, then twenty-two, recalled, "This tall man came

in, and I said to my cousin, 'Look at that long, skinny fellow.' He looked at me so insulted, and then he came over to sit with us. He understood what I said because he had stayed with people in the countryside, and he had learned a little Dutch."

Alex, a member of an antitank regiment, was part of the First Canadian Army, which had helped liberate Holland from September 1944 to April 1945. The Canadians eventually captured the Scheldt estuary and freed up the port of Antwerp for the Allies. The Canadians went on to clear the Germans from the northern and western parts of the Netherlands. To this day, Canadians are regarded with special fondness in Holland.<sup>30</sup> Ella has three photos of Alex and his antitank regiment. Alex, well over six feet tall, is shown with six of his compatriots in a farmer's field with a roadside fence and a little girl behind them. Three of the soldiers are sitting on a fence and may be Cape Bretoners, since they are playing a fiddle, a mandolin, and a guitar. Alex is one of four soldiers sitting on the ground in front of the musicians. Another photo shows Alex, one of twenty-one soldiers standing and sitting in the same field, with a soldier/cook out in front. Yet another photo shows seven officers of the antitank regiment, six of them wearing berets and a seventh sporting a helmet with goggles.

Ella recollected, "We went home back to Amsterdam. I went to the theatre a couple of evenings later with my mother, and Alex was there. We went together for a couple of months. Then Alex got word that he was supposed to go back to his outfit. In December, Alex asked me to marry him." Alex, who could speak some Dutch by then, explained to Ella that he was a widower with three children back in Canada. Alex's first wife, Doris Williams, had died of a blood clot, a complication of childbirth, and they were left with three daughters, Millie, Teresa, and Mary, who lived with Alex's parents, Mike and Priscilla (Benny) Barron at Ingonish Harbour.<sup>31</sup>

Ella and Alex were married on 24 January 1946 before a justice of the peace. Mrs. Lobbes baked their wedding cake, and they had a small reception at Ella's relatives' home. Ella has a picture of Mrs. Lobbes and herself together with a small child. In their wedding photo, Ella looked attractive in a pin-striped suit. Alex wore his army dress uniform with a beret, shirt, and tie. Another wedding photo shows Ella and Alex with Ella's mom, her sister Dien, and another sister and her husband. Nobody was smiling in the photo, doubtless because the family realized that they might not see Ella again, or at least not for a long time.<sup>32</sup>

## Ella Departs for Canada

Ella left the Hook of Holland on 31 May 1946, and she and other Dutch war brides went to England, where they met even more brides destined for Canada. They stayed there for a week and then boarded the liner *Queen Mary* for Canada. “It was a very emotional time,” noted Ella, “especially for the English war brides, many with children who were saying goodbye to their families and friends . . . very emotional.”<sup>33</sup> Ella and the other war brides travelled in cabin class and landed in Halifax at Pier 21 on 15 June 1946. “Most of the English war brides were wearing fur coats, and I remember wondering if there was snow in Canada in June.”<sup>34</sup> Ella still has among her prized possessions her disembarkation card from the Hook of Holland with her passport number and her landed immigrant card. Ella was supposed to stay in a Halifax hotel on the night of 15 June, but word arrived that the train for North Sydney was departing that evening. “I ended up in North Sydney, and I was not feeling well. . . . I came a day too early, and so there was nobody there to meet me.” After an eighteen-hour train ride from Halifax, Ella looked forward to arriving in North Sydney, where Alex was meant to meet her, but he was not there. “Here I was expecting our first baby. I couldn’t speak a word of English, and I thought my new husband had deserted me. I just wanted to turn around and go home.”<sup>35</sup> Fortunately for Ella, she had the address of Frances, Alex’s sister. “I showed it to a kindly taxi driver, who drove me there, where Alex was waiting.” Frances Robinson lived in North Sydney on Lorne Street.<sup>36</sup> Ella and Alex stayed in a hotel that night and left for Ingonish the next day.

## Arriving in Ingonish and Adjusting to Village Life

Ella and Alex departed North Sydney for Ingonish over a bumpy, gravel road. There were two ferries to cross—the Ross Ferry and the Englishtown Ferry—and after a two-hour journey, they arrived at the base of Smokey Mountain. Nothing could have prepared Ella for the “cow path” over the mountain and the village world of Ingonish that waited below.

Ella and Alex stayed with Alex’s parents in Ingonish Harbour for the summer. Ella noted, “What bothered me the most [was that] we went into a strange house.”<sup>37</sup> Some of those who greeted Ella had mixed feelings, especially Alex’s sisters, Stella and Rade (Rae). They were perhaps wary of their brother’s return from Europe with a new bride, whom they had never met and whose

experiences were foreign to their own in the small Cape Breton village. This would set the tone for Ella's life in Ingonish.

Ella and Alex lived in his parents' house for most of the summer, and their first baby, Betty, was born in Ingonish Harbour on 22 August 1946. Isabel MacDonald, the public health nurse, delivered baby Betty and comforted Ella as best she could. Imagine Ella as a young woman, knowing little or no English, in a new country, about to deliver her first baby. On 8 November, Ella and Alex moved into their house in Ingonish Beach, two miles away. "It was the baby and all our belongings in a horse and buggy." Ella recalled the house to her grandson Jordan Nearing, who later relayed, "When Nan first walked into the house, she wanted to turn around and go back to Amsterdam. They had no power, no water, and no heat. To make things worse, Grandfather had purchased the house from his first wife's father. He had lived there with his first wife. This did not make Nan very happy." Ella continued, "I went in, and I could see nothing. It was so dark. I said, 'I am not going to live here.' Alex said, 'You may get used to it.' I was scared to death because the first wife was waked in the room. I made him [Alex] take down the partition so I would not be so scared."<sup>38</sup> As noted earlier, Alex's first wife, Doris Williams, had died from a blood clot, a complication of childbirth.<sup>39</sup> When Alex married Ella, he no longer received the widow's pension, which went to Alex's parents, the guardians of his daughters, for support. The loss of the pension, which would have been some money in a financially deprived rural economy, added further tension to the family's life.<sup>40</sup>

Only twenty-three years old, Ella was a young bride who had lived through desperate wartime conditions, but she now faced another daunting struggle—attempting to adjust to married, family, and village life. The transition to the new house was difficult, and the changes continued apace. Ella talked about the tensions: "I felt I was not welcome down here [Ingonish Beach]. It was a rough time for quite a few years." Ella explained why life was difficult: "I couldn't cook, bake bread." Even more daunting, Ella was a Protestant. She had been married overseas before a judge. In everyday life, Ella had little or no formal religion, but that hardly mattered to the people of south Ingonish. Out of respect for her husband, Ella had started training in the sacraments and rites of the Catholic faith before she left Holland. Mrs. Lobbes, Ella's landlady, was a Catholic, so she began to explain some of the customs of the Roman Catholic religious traditions to Ella. Ella also took a course in Catholicism, and the priest who offered the course gave Ella a letter to give

to Father Joseph Day, the Ingonish parish priest. Ella was clearly trying to fit into the faith of her new neighbours. Certainly, Alex urged this transition in the letters he wrote. Alex wrote from England on 6 February 1946, a few weeks after leaving Ella for Canada: "Tell me if you are taking instructions yet to be a Catholic. I hope you are as you know it means a lot to me and my people."<sup>41</sup> On 9 March, Alex wrote from Ingonish Harbour: "Elly in your letter of Feb 7th you told me you were going to the priest, honey I am glad to hear that as I want you to be a Catholic."<sup>42</sup> On 11 March Alex wrote again, "Elly I am so happy to know that you are learning to be Catholic. You know it will be better for me and you as my people are all Catholic."<sup>43</sup> Canadian policy generally favoured soldiers marrying women from the same religious background.

## Recovering from War

When Ella arrived in Ingonish in June 1946, the community, like most towns and villages in the northern hemisphere, was in a postwar recovery. Practically all of the young men in the village had gone to war. With Canadian participation in the War in Afghanistan, we understand that soldiers in combat develop post-traumatic stress disorder. How could it be otherwise? There were 250,000 casualties on the allied side of the conflict in the Normandy invasion, "making Normandy a more costly battle than the infamous First World War killing ground at Passchendaele." The Canadian soldiers played a "major role" in five of the most significant battles of the Normandy campaign, resulting in 18,444 casualties, including 5,021 killed in action.<sup>44</sup> Ingonish soldiers paid a heavy price in Normandy and in the push to Germany; they were killed, captured, and wounded. Those casualties were part of the context for Ella's arrival in the postwar community.

World War II was a life-and-death struggle that affected lives throughout the world, especially in the northern hemisphere. Alex Barron knew or knew of all the Ingonish soldiers who served overseas, most on a first-name basis. Such is the nature of small village life. Approximately one hundred individuals from the Ingonishes,<sup>45</sup> or with close Ingonish connections, served in the Canadian armed forces and merchant marine.<sup>46</sup> Chester Dunphy, a member of a tank crew, went ashore on D-Day, 6 June 1944. Chester's tank was disabled, but he joined another tank and continued in combat.<sup>47</sup> Jim Donovan also landed in the Normandy invasion, but he was captured and served the rest of the war as a German prisoner of war. He suffered hardships as a prisoner,



including being forced to drink boiled grass and potato peelings.<sup>48</sup> To this day, Jim Donovan is affectionately known as “prisoner Jim,” a mark of distinction and respect for him and his descendants in the community.

There were numerous casualties, physical and mental, that affected Ingonish soldiers, but this chapter will only note a few. Joe Doucette, a member of the Royal Canadian Artillery, Nineteenth Battery, was killed in action in Italy on 4 September 1944.<sup>49</sup> Only twenty-four years old, his family dearly grieved his loss, and they still do, recalled Joe’s brother Bert: “Dad and Mom would never accept that Joe died. They would leave the door open each night in the hope that he might come home.”<sup>50</sup> Christie MacLeod Ross, a native of the south side of Smokey Mountain, had five sons who served in the Canadian army. They included Jack, Norman, Walter, and Murdock, who lived in North Gut, Victoria County.<sup>51</sup> Murdock Ross (1917–44), a stretcher bearer, was killed on 25 July.<sup>52</sup> Wilfrid MacLeod, stepbrother of Murdock, recalled that he only lived a few hours after being wounded. Wilfrid (1925–2012), the youngest of the five brothers, served overseas and was wounded in the hip defending Nijmegen Bridge on Sunday, 3 December 1944. A German bomber flew over and strafed the soldiers, killing nine and wounding twenty-eight in a matter of seconds. Wilfrid and other members of the battalion were in a field attending a church service. Wilfrid, who had seen much action since landing at Juno Beach in June 1944, was “kind of glad to get wounded to get out of there for a while.”<sup>53</sup> Wilfrid spent five weeks in the hospital recovering and carried pieces of shrapnel in his body for the rest of his life.

The MacLeods, well liked and respected, were known for their kindness and hospitality to people travelling on foot from Ingonish to North Sydney and beyond. People took the path over the mountain at Ingonish Ferry because it was only a thirty-minute walk to the MacLeods at Cape Smokey. The MacLeods usually offered a cup of tea and tea biscuits for the travellers.<sup>54</sup> Wilfrid MacLeod was a friend of Jim Brewer, a member of the heavy artillery who was severely wounded and sent home on the *Lady Nelson*, a hospital ship. Jim arrived in Halifax on 21 April 1945 and remained in Camp Hill Hospital until 4 June. Injured in October 1944, Jim had suffered three bayonet wounds to his left arm. He also developed asthma and suffered post-traumatic stress disorder, and according to his wife, Molly McGean, he was never the same after the war.<sup>55</sup>

Like Jim Brewer, Ella’s husband, Alex, sustained harmful effects from the war. Over six feet tall and two hundred pounds, Alex was an able man, and

he was soon placed on the front lines as a member of an antitank regiment against the German war machine.<sup>56</sup> Due to intense shelling, explosions, dust, the smell of cordite, and diesel fumes in the tanks, Alex developed debilitating emphysema, which eventually led to his death in 1989. Alex also endured severe post-traumatic stress disorder, especially from witnessing countless injuries and deaths. He suffered terribly after the war, often waking at night “screaming and losing his breath.”<sup>57</sup> When Alex woke up in the night, Ella was frightened, but she was always there for her husband, offering comfort and support.<sup>58</sup>

Ingonish residents were not accustomed to immigrants such as Ella coming into the community to live full time. When Ella debarked at Pier 21 from the *Queen Mary* on 15 June 1946, she was the only war bride on the train coming to Cape Breton. There was little formal education in the community to teach children and adults about the outside world, including war brides. Most learning was gained through practical experience, learned from life’s lessons. Lillian Devoe, a sixteen-year-old teacher from Little Bras d’Or, had come to Ingonish in 1911 to teach in Ingonish Beach. Lillian provided an overview of educational standards in the Ingonish area. Besides Lillian, there were two other teachers from Margaree in Ingonish: Rebecca Coady (a sister of Dr. Moses Coady) taught in the school at Ingonish Ferry and Christine Cameron taught in the school near a Catholic church in Ingonish Centre. Lillian had sixty students on the school register, but only ten students came to school on a regular basis.<sup>59</sup> Educational standards gradually improved from the 1920s to the 1950s, but not markedly so. The most accomplished students went to grade 9 because that was the highest level available.<sup>60</sup>

Formal education had little value because people were employed in the fishery, farming, forestry, mining, and other primary occupations that did not require extensive schooling. Young people also had the option of moving away, and many did. The population of Ingonish had grown steadily from 176 in 1838 to 1,266 in 1891. By 1901, the Ingonish population declined to 954 as people moved to the coal towns and the steel plants in Sydney Mines and Sydney.<sup>61</sup> The population only increased modestly for the next one hundred years.

## The Pace of Village Life

After the war, Alex began to work at various jobs. “I have another job now at carpenter work,” Alex wrote to Ella on 26 May 1946. “I make more money

six dollars and forty cents a day, that is the same as sixteen guilders.”<sup>62</sup> Alex eventually got a loan of \$500 from Matthew Hawley to buy a small boat and began to fish.<sup>63</sup> Life as a fisherman, however, could be precarious. There was no unemployment insurance in those days, and thus Alex and Ella purchased groceries on credit from Bridget and Tom Shea’s store on the hill. “We remained in their books all winter,” noted Ella, “and in the spring the first earnings went to pay off the winter bill. It was very hard in those early years, you never caught up, and so much depended on a good fishing catch.”<sup>64</sup>

The Sheas, responsible merchants, were good to the postwar newlyweds, as they were to all people in the community. One witness recalled that Bridget Shea “carried everybody” on credit during the winter.<sup>65</sup> As for the fishery, Alex was paid in cash at settlement time. Wages in the fishery were generally low and remained so for much of the twentieth century.<sup>66</sup> Alex was paid in cash, but the payment for his work was reminiscent of the truck system in which fishermen received little or no cash after they paid off their debts, usually to the fishing proprietor. Ingonish was a remote fishing village that was largely a cashless economy, and like most of the maritime communities, it remained so until the 1960s.<sup>67</sup>

## Conclusion

Ella Barron eventually overcame the discrimination that she faced as a young Dutch war bride. Her strong character, her sense of purpose, the hardships she endured during the war, and the passage of time helped protect her from the intolerance she faced as an immigrant. Ella had a voice, and she was determined to be heard. Over the past fifty years, I have interviewed more than 150 people from Ingonish, preserved as digital audio recordings at Cape Breton University.<sup>68</sup> Of all the individuals interviewed, Ella was among the most determined to tell “her story.” She had lived through five years of Nazi occupation and the injustices of that regime. Recalling the war years, Ella noted, “It took people here a long time to realize what I went through.”<sup>69</sup>

As time passed, Ella learned how to speak English, and she received all of the sacraments of the Roman Catholic faith, including being remarried in St. Peter’s Catholic Church in Ingonish.<sup>70</sup> Ella has lived long enough to see the sectarianism among the Catholic, Presbyterian, United, and Anglican Churches in Ingonish and beyond become petty and irrelevant. Throughout the Western world—Europe and North America above Mexico—the message

of the Christian churches has fallen on hard times. Churches are closing, and buildings are being demolished or repurposed. The Christian churches have suffered because of the sexual exploitation of children, misogyny, corruption, and colonialism, especially the mistreatment of Indigenous people. Throughout her life, part of the long twentieth century, Ella has witnessed momentous change.

Ella became a member of the community and adapted to the customs of her Canadian home. Ella also learned how to cook, especially how to bake bread. She experienced indescribable heartache due to the death of a newborn child, something that women carry with them for the rest of their lives. Baby Aletta Anne, her third child, was born on 4 November 1948 at Buchanan Memorial Hospital in Neil's Harbour, and she died on 31 December 1948.<sup>71</sup> The baby was sick, but Ella stated, "Nobody would help me. I got the blame. I couldn't get anybody to take her to the hospital."<sup>72</sup> The women of the village rallied around Ella, at least in spirit, providing empathy and emotional support, especially those who had experienced miscarriages.<sup>73</sup>

Ella stood up for and protected her children when they faced discrimination because of their Dutch ancestry. This was ironic because the Dutch were favoured officially by Canadian immigration policy, while other groups of immigrants were excluded.<sup>74</sup> "I felt sorry for the children in the community," recalled Ella. "It took people a long time here to realize what I went through. It was harder on the kids. They used to be beaten. They couldn't go outside, Betty and Alex especially." For Ella, "the hardest thing was seeing the kids suffer."<sup>75</sup>

Ella faced constant challenges, including living with her husband, who had a troubled life. Ella recalled patching the boys' clothing in the evenings, and she often "had regrets about getting married." Alex was a good man, in many ways, but he suffered, like many veterans, from post-traumatic stress disorder and compromised health. Ella's major complaint about Alex was that he drank too much and that he did not have patience with the children.<sup>76</sup>

Ella's working-class background, her demeaning treatment at school, and her impoverished life in Amsterdam doubtlessly helped her cope with the poverty she faced as a young bride and mother in Ingonish. If it was any consolation, most people in the village faced the same difficult economic circumstances. Beginning in 1973, Ella started to work outside the home doing housekeeping duties for five employers over the next ten years. She was able to earn additional income for the family and gain independence because she now had her own money. Ella's life embodied the subthemes of this

volume, including her movement and migration from the Netherlands to Canada and the urban and rural divide between Amsterdam and Ingonish. When Ella moved to Ingonish, she recalled, “It was like living on a different planet. I was used to the city and getting used to people’s ways and them getting used to mine was hard.”<sup>77</sup>

As for the theme of culture and identities, this is perhaps the most mystifying issue, one faced by all immigrants and migrants throughout the world. When Ella’s mother died in 1965, it had been nineteen years since she had left the Netherlands. Ella felt an intense longing for home, but she would have to wait until 1977 to afford the trip. During the journey, Ella had a marvellous time seeing relatives and renewing acquaintances. Alex was afraid that she would not return. Ella had “always retained such a love of Holland,” and she returned several times and keeps in touch with family to this day. On her return voyages to Holland in 1977, 2010, and later, Ella witnessed how Amsterdam had developed into a large, cosmopolitan city.<sup>78</sup> Holland had changed, as Ella did herself, and she recognized that her home was in Canada; she was Canadian. She had reared nine children in Ingonish, and she had gained the admiration and respect of the community. Ella persevered and ultimately prevailed, largely due to her strong character and love of family—especially her dedication to her children. She did not stray from these objectives.

## Notes

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1. See the website Canadian War Brides, <http://www.canadianwarbrides.com>. The experiences of Canadian war brides have attracted much popular attention in recent decades. See Lyster, *Most Excellent Citizens*; Smith, *Edith’s War*; Jarratt, *War Brides*; Jarratt, *Captured Hearts*; Ladouceur and Spence, *Blackouts to Bright Lights*; Granfield, *Brass Buttons and Silver Horseshoes*; O’Hara, *From Romance to Reality*; Shewchuk, *If Kisses Were Roses*; Wicks, *Promise You’ll Take Care of My Daughter*; Granfield, *Pier 21*; Brown, Krachun, and Stowbridge, *Doors Held Ajar*.
2. Berthiaume Shukert and Smith Scibetta, *War Brides of World War II*.
3. Boothby, “Displaced Children,” 106; Kuterovac, “Children in War,” 363–75.
4. Ella Barron, interview by author, 2 January 2016.

5. For an overview of war brides entering Canada, see Raska, "Movement of War Brides," <https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/movement-of-war-brides-and-their-children-through-pier-21>.
6. See Guntheroth, *Crib Death*; Hoffman, Damus, Hillman, and Krongrad, "Risk Factors for SIDS," 13–30.
7. Ella Barron, interview by author, 2 January 2016.
8. Ella Barron, interview by author, 30 June 2008.
9. Ella Barron Letters. There are thirty-eight items in the collection. Two cablegrams and thirty-six letters, all written by Alex to Ella. Ella's letters to Alex have not survived. Alex wrote two letters to Ella when she visited Holland in August 1977. Alex to Ella, 14 August 1977; 17 August 1977, letters in possession of Ella Barron.
10. Ella Barron, interview by author, 30 June 2008; Ella Barron, interview by author, 2 January 2016.
11. For a brief introduction to the literature on peer status among children, see Boivin and Begin, "Peer Status and Self Perception," 591–96; Dodge, "Behavioral Antecedents of Peer Social Status," 1387–99; Hops and Finch, "Social Competence and Skill," 23–39.
12. Ella Barron, interview by author, 30 June 2008.
13. Ella Barron, interview by author, 2 January 2016.
14. Burleigh, *Third Reich*, 631.
15. Ella had a camera that took beautiful black-and-white pictures, and she saved these pictures down to the present day.
16. Jordan Nearing, "My Grandmother: A Canadian War Bride" (school project by eleven-year-old Nearing, New Waterford, 2009).
17. Burleigh, *Third Reich*; see the chap. "Living in a Land with No Future: German Jews and Their Neighbours, 1933–1939," 281–342.
18. For the German invasion of Holland, see Amersfoort and Kamphuis, *May 1940*.
19. Ella Barron, interview by author, 30 June 2008.
20. See the critical historical work of Friedlander, *Years of Extermination*.
21. There is extensive published work on Anne Frank. For a brief overview, see Frank, *Diary of Anne Frank*; Goodrich and Hackett, *Diary of Anne Frank*; Gies and Gold, *Anne Frank Remembered*; van der Rol, Verhoeven, and Quindlen, introduction; Müller, *Anne Frank*; Prose, *Anne Frank*; van Maarsen, *My Name Is Anne, She Said*.
22. Griffioen and Zeller, "Netherlands," 1–7; see also Griffioen and Zeller, "Comparing the Persecution"; Griffioen and Zeller, "Anti-Jewish Policy," 437–73.

23. For an overview of the Nazi treatment of Jews in Holland, see Presser, *Ashes in the Wind*.
24. "Prosecution Documents," in *The Trial of Adolf Eichmann: Record of the Proceedings of the District Court of Jerusalem*, vol. 9 (Jerusalem: Ministry of Justice of the State of Israel, 1992–1995).
25. See Becker, "Role of Synthetic Fuel," 45–53; Stokes, "Oil Industry in Nazi Germany," 254–77; Stranges, "History of the Fischer-Tropsch Synthesis"; Hayward, "Hitler's Quest for Oil," 96.
26. Ella Barron, interview by author, 30 June 2008.
27. Barron, interview.
28. Barron, interview.
29. De Zwarte, "Coordinating Hunger," 132–49.
30. Reid, "Grateful Nation," 40–49.
31. Ella Barron, interview by author, 21 January 2020; Emmerson Barron, interview by author, 3 February 2019. Emerson believed that Doris had died of cancer. See also the obituary of Teresa Priscilla Barron, 1936–2019, <https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/sydney-mines-ns/teresa-barron-8790438>.
32. Canadian Museum of Immigration, Pier 21, "Annette Brunton," accessed 17 January 2024, <https://pier21.ca/walls/Honour/Annette-Brunton>. See statement by Annette Brunton née Van der Vegt, a Dutch war bride who came to Canada on the *Queen Mary* in July 1946, one month after Ella Barron. Annette stated that her parents were sad to see her leave Holland: "My mother was very sad and upset. Although we all knew I would leave some time, the time was getting so close. I don't think I shed one tear; to me it was all wonderful."
33. Scobie, "Days of Being a War Bride."
34. Scobie.
35. Scobie.
36. Letter from Alex Barron to Ella Barron, North Sydney, 24 February 1946.
37. Ella Barron, interview by Ken Donovan, 30 June 2008.
38. Barron, interview.
39. Ella Barron, interview by Ken Donovan, 21 January 2020.
40. Ella Barron, interview by Ken Donovan, 30 June 2008; Nearing, "My Grandmother," 7; Ella Barron, interview by Ken Donovan, 3 February 2019.
41. Letter from Alex Barron to Ella, England, 6 February 1946, letters in possession of Ella Barron.
42. Alex Barron to Ella Barron, Ingonish Harbour, 9 March 1946.
43. Alex Barron to Ella Barron, 11 March 1946.
44. Copp, *Cinderella Army*, 7.

45. The Ingonishes included five divisions: Ingonish Ferry, Ingonish Harbour, Ingonish Beach, Ingonish Centre, and Ingonish.
46. See Thornhill and MacDonald, *In the Morning*; Barron, *Ingonish Roots*, 234. Ingonish Roots noted sixty-one people from South Ingonish who were veterans of World War II, but not all of these people served overseas.
47. Percy Dunphy, interview by Ken Donovan, 6 March 2009. Percy, the brother of Chester Dunphy, was born in October 1923.
48. Thornhill and MacDonald, *In the Morning*, 302.
49. Thornhill and MacDonald, 306.
50. Bert Doucette, interview by Ken Donovan, 4 January 2020. Bert Doucette, brother of Joe Doucette, was born on 24 October 1935.
51. Obituary of Donald Ross, *Cape Breton Post*, 15 October 2007. Donald was the son of William and Christine (MacLeod) Ross. Wilfrid was a half brother to the four killed soldiers.
52. Murdock Ross, Canadian Virtual War Memorial, Veterans Affairs Canada, Royal Canadian Medical Corps, 22 Field Ambulance, commemorated on 432 of the Second World War Book of Remembrance, <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/canadian-virtual-war-memorial/detail/27833>.
53. Wilfrid MacLeod, interview by Ken Donovan, 28 October 2007. Wilfrid was born on 19 March 1925.
54. MacLeod, interview.
55. Mary (Molly) Catherine McGean, interview by Ken Donovan, 29 November 2009. Mary was born on 3 October 1923. Mary married Jim Brewer on 28 April 1942.
56. Ella Barron, interview by Ken Donovan, 21 January 2020.
57. Nearing, "My Grandmother," 7.
58. Ella Barron, interview by Ken Donovan, 21 January 2020.
59. Lillian Devoe, interview by Ken Donovan, 17 January 1987. Lillian Devoe was born on 15 August 1895.
60. Based on numerous interviews. See the following: Loretta Bridget Donovan MacNeil, interview by Ken Donovan, 22 September 1990. Loretta Donovan was born on 19 November 1913. Helen Cathcart, interview by Ken Donovan, 29 November 1987. Helen Cathcart was born on 22 March 1902. Sidney Sylvester Donovan, interview by Ken Donovan, 16 August 1992. Sid Donovan was born on 12 September 1906.
61. Nova Scotia provincial census records, population of Ingonish for 1838 and 1861. Census of Nova Scotia, 1838, RS1, vol. 450, Public Archives of Nova Scotia, Halifax, NS. See Federal censuses of Canada, Library and Archives Canada, <https://library-archives.canada.ca/eng/collection/research-help/genealogy>



- family-history/censuses/Pages/dominion-canada.aspx, for Ingonish in 1871, 1881, 1891, and 1901. Cited in Donovan, "Mary Grace Barron," 211–12.
62. Alex Barron to Ella, Ingonish, 26 May 1946.
  63. Ella Barron, interview by Ken Donovan, 21 January 2020.
  64. Scobie, "Days of Being a War Bride."
  65. Percy Dunphy, interview by Ken Donovan, 6 March 2009. Percy was born on 3 October 1923.
  66. For evidence of the low wages paid in the fishery, see the interviews of James Barron, 28 December 2009. James was born on 29 March 1932. See also interview of Percy Dunphy, 6 March 2009.
  67. For background on the history of Ingonish, see Donovan, "Precontact and Settlement," 330–87; Donovan, "Mary Grace Barron," 177–237; Donovan, "Interview with Geoffrey S. Cornish," 322–87; Barron, *Ingonish Roots*; Jackson, *Cape Breton*; Patterson, *History of Victoria County*; Donovan, "History of Ingonish"; Donovan, "History of the Trap-Net Fishery"; Williams, *Keep to the Light*.
  68. These 150 recordings have been preserved as MP3s at the Beaton Institute of Cape Breton. The three recordings of Ella will be available to the public. Thank you to Catherine Arseneau, Jane Arnold, Christie MacNeil, and Chris Jones for your efforts on my behalf.
  69. Ella Barron, interview by Ken Donovan, 21 January 2020.
  70. Barron, interview. People were also remarried in the Catholic Church in eighteenth-century Louisbourg. Tens of Catholic couples had their marriages "rehabilitated" or were remarried, if they were married before by an Anglican priest in Boston or other communities. See Johnston, *Religion in Life at Louisbourg*.
  71. The ten children included were Betty, Alex, Aletta, Michael, Gerald, Frances, Patricia, Sheila, Shirley, and Sandra.
  72. Ella Barron, interview by Ken Donovan, 21 January 2020.
  73. Based on conversations with several Ingonish women.
  74. Raska, "Movement of War Brides," <https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/movement-war-brides-and-children-pier-21>.
  75. Ella Barron, interview by Ken Donovan, 21 January 2020.
  76. Barron, interview.
  77. Scobie, "Days of Being a War Bride."
  78. Austin Hawley to Ken Donovan, email, 8 June 2020. Austin is Ella's nephew. Austin's mother was a sister of Alex Barron.

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## 8 **Twenty-First-Century Uses for Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia Gaelic Song Collections**

### **From Language Preservation to Revitalization and the Articulation of Cultural Values**

*Heather Sparling*

Hi ri, ho ró, ma thig sibh dlùth  
Gun seinn mi duanag dhuibh as ùr:  
'S e cainnt nan Gàidheal as iffe cliù  
Gu togail iff air òrain.

*Hi ri, ho ro, if you come close  
That I may sing you a new song  
It's the language of the Gaels of highest prestige  
That raises cheer in the song.*

“Moladh a’ Bhàird dha Mhuinntir-Dùthcha” (The bard’s  
praise of the nation’s people), by Iain MacMhuirich  
(John Currie) of Blackett’s Lake, Cape Breton

Iain MacMhuirich (John Currie) was born into a long line of elite clan bards in Scotland. He composed these lyrics in early twentieth-century Cape Breton, at a time when thousands of Gaelic speakers lived on the island and Gaelic-speaking communities could be found in just about every Canadian province.<sup>1</sup> In fact, Gaelic was the third most spoken language in Canada—after English

and French—at the time of Confederation in 1867. By the turn of the twentieth century, approximately fifty thousand Gaelic speakers could be found in the eastern counties of Nova Scotia alone.<sup>2</sup> We might understand Gaelic language and culture as having been dominant—in Raymond Williams’s sense of the word, as laid out by the coeditors in their introduction to this volume—in rural areas of eastern Nova Scotia in the early twentieth century.

Currie’s song is just one of many examples of lyrics created by new world bards praising the Gaelic language. Many songs assert its prestige and value. It is important not just that the assertion is made that the Gaelic language is valuable but that it is made *in song*, for songs have always formed the backbone of Gaelic literature. Bards were once some of the most powerful and elite members of Gaelic society, their oral literature documenting clan victories, histories, heroes, and lineages.

Sometimes bards also acknowledged the language’s decline, as in “An Tè a Chaill a Gàidhlig” (The woman who lost her Gaelic), a song by another Cape Breton bard, the Bard MacDermitt, which describes an encounter with a young woman who moved to Boston and refused to admit that she spoke and understood Gaelic, presumably because it would taint her newfound (and perhaps hard-won) urban, cosmopolitan identity. These two songs—Iain MacMhuirich’s and the Bard MacDermitt’s—can both be found in published Gaelic song collections by Calum Macleod and Helen Creighton, respectively.<sup>3</sup> Macleod was a native Gaelic speaker from Scotland who lived in Nova Scotia for almost thirty years. Creighton was a nonspeaker from Dartmouth, near Halifax. Their Nova Scotia Gaelic song collections are just two among a significant number of collections made throughout the twentieth century.

What are we to make of these and many other Nova Scotia Gaelic song collections, especially given that most collectors were neither Gaelic speakers nor from Nova Scotia? While some came from Scotland and Nova Scotia, most came from the United States. Given the sustained efforts to eradicate Gaelic in both Scotland and Canada, notably through the education system where students were required to speak English and punished for speaking Gaelic, why were Gaelic songs collected and published? And what use do these collections have today, particularly in Nova Scotia, where the shift from a first-language Gaelic community to one consisting primarily of learners is almost complete?

When Gaelic-speaking immigrants settled Cape Breton Island and the eastern counties of mainland Nova Scotia in the late eighteenth and early



nineteenth centuries, they brought their traditional expressions and practices as well, including song. They transmitted those songs *bho ghluin gu gluin*—from knee to knee—over generations. They also made new songs, songs that gave voice to their experiences, characterized their friends and neighbours, and captured key moments in their history. They made songs, such as the one quoted above, that assert the value of the Gaelic language, song, and culture. For almost as long, those newly created songs have been documented, first in print and later on recordings. Those who count themselves among the Gaelic community feel fortunate that these documentation efforts have preserved an exceptionally rich, deep, and varied song repertoire, particularly now that we find ourselves at a time when rigorous efforts to revitalize Gaelic are being made after a long period of significant decline. As a result of many systemic forces, including urbanization and industrialization, Gaelic shifted over the course of the twentieth century from a dominant culture in Nova Scotia to a residual one (residual in Raymond Williams's sense of the word<sup>4</sup>): one formed in the past but still an active cultural presence.

This chapter focuses on the history of Gaelic song collecting in Nova Scotia from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present.<sup>5</sup> Although collectors didn't actually begin collecting Gaelic songs until the twentieth century, their interests were strongly shaped by a nineteenth-century movement that linked national and folk cultures and consequently valorized the cultural expressions of the masses, discussed further below. The majority of Nova Scotia Gaelic song collecting took place from the 1930s to the 1970s, a time when the Gaelic language was rapidly declining but was still dominant in rural communities. Today, these collections provide a foundation for significant efforts to revitalize the language and culture.

Gaelic song documentation is spread over many sources, from books to archives to online repositories, making it difficult for someone just starting to discover Gaelic song to know where to look, particularly when it comes to lesser-known manuscripts, archival collections, and out-of-print books. So part of the purpose of this chapter is to provide a history of Gaelic song collecting in Nova Scotia and an annotated guide to existing sources.<sup>6</sup> But at a time when song collecting has all but ceased in Nova Scotia—largely because the majority of the existing repertoire has already been documented—it is also worth considering how these collections are being used currently.

Although Gaelic song, music, and dance were practised in Nova Scotia from the time the first immigrants arrived from Scotland, we are somewhat

limited in what we know about these practices prior to the twentieth century. Recording technologies were neither developed nor readily available until the early twentieth century, so we really don't have an audio-visual record of earlier song, music, or dance. Singers and musicians mostly played by ear, and music notation was only rarely provided in the few song collections that were produced.<sup>7</sup> Most Gaelic song books that existed prior to the twentieth century came from Scotland rather than Nova Scotia.<sup>8</sup> While descriptions of earlier song and singing do exist, ethnomusicologists like to say that “writing about music is like dancing about architecture.” In other words, verbal descriptions are limited in their abilities to depict songs and singing in all their performative, sonic, and kinesthetic aspects.

A second reason for starting with the twentieth century is that this is the point when folklorists (and later ethnomusicologists), particularly from outside the area, began collecting, studying, and analyzing Gaelic song, music, and dance in Nova Scotia as a scholarly pursuit. Although songs were collected and published prior to the twentieth century, it was not from a folklore (or ethnomusicological) perspective. Rather, songs tended to be collected as Gaelic literature—poems—rather than as music.<sup>9</sup>

This chapter will document the history of Gaelic song collecting in Nova Scotia, starting with who collected Gaelic songs, how Gaelic songs were documented, and where they can be found today. From there, I will discuss how collections are today being used not only to support language revitalization efforts but to shape and articulate Gaelic values of artistic creation, hospitality and inclusion, and family lineage and legacy.

## Collectors of Gaelic Song

The range and number of Gaelic song collectors active in Nova Scotia during the twentieth century is astonishing. There were collectors from Scotland, such as John Lorne Campbell and Gordon MacLennan; collectors from Nova Scotia, like Helen Creighton and Lilius Toward; and a surprising number of American collectors, including Diane Guggenheim and Ralph Rinzler. What motivated so many people—almost all of whom were from outside the province and non-Gaelic speakers—to collect Gaelic songs in Nova Scotia?

As with nearly all folkloric collecting in the early twentieth century, the scholarly interest in Gaelic song in Nova Scotia was initially strongly informed by romantic nationalist agendas.<sup>10</sup> The German philosopher Johann Gottfried

Herder (1744–1803) was highly influential in developing what became known as romantic nationalism and a valorization of folk cultures.<sup>11</sup> He was both antimodernist and anti-Enlightenment. He resisted the Enlightenment’s dismissal of folk culture as ignorant, and he opposed the trend in the modern arts of his day to follow foreign fashions and trends.<sup>12</sup> To put it simply, Herder argued that each nation-state needed to have its own distinct cultural practices rooted in its own distinct language, for Herder believed that it was “the culture of the Folk, their tales and music and crafts [that] encapsulated the natural ‘cultural core’ before it was complicated (and perhaps corrupted) by ‘society.’”<sup>13</sup> In an age marked by struggles for national independence in Europe and its colonies (e.g., the French and American Revolutions, the Napoleonic Wars), Herder’s ideas provided the means and justification for asserting political independence. In Scotland, although it had shared its head of state with England since 1603 and joined with England to form the United Kingdom in 1707, the tenets of romantic nationalism provided Scots—particularly the Gaelic-speaking Highlanders—with the means of presenting themselves as culturally distinct from England. Archaeologist Simon James has shown how the very concept of the Celts, understood today to encompass all Celtic-language-speaking peoples—namely, Irish, Scottish Gaels, Manx, Cornish, Welsh, and Bretons—emerged through romantic nationalism as a means of resisting Anglo-Saxon cultural (if not political) dominance.<sup>14</sup> In reality, of course, folk culture did not so much testify to an older, more authentic nation as it was used to construct an idealized version of it.<sup>15</sup>

Collecting a nation’s distinctive cultural practices became a means of validating a nation’s existence and, in areas encompassing more than one ethnic identity, sometimes used to fight for political independence (Ireland, for example, used cultural nationalism to fight for political independence from England). Because Herder placed particular importance on national languages, songs—as combinations of language and music—were seen as especially valuable cultural markers. Song collection activities proliferated.<sup>16</sup> Early song collectors in Canada and the US were interested primarily in offering whether “old country” songs still existed in the “new world,” particularly those no longer known in their countries of origin.<sup>17</sup> For example, Stephanie Conn documents American collector MacEdward Leach’s search in Cape Breton for ancient Celtic texts such as Fenian lays and “songs that go as far back as Ossian.”<sup>18</sup>

Later, Canadian and American folklorists became interested in documenting their own nations’ regional cultures, particularly as they began to

fear their loss due to increasing urbanization and industrialization, which many believed was causing the loss of traditional music-making contexts (such as, for example, kitchen parties and *ceilidhs*) and the loss of minority languages in culturally diverse and cosmopolitan cities such as Halifax and Sydney. Singers within Scottish song traditions (whether English or Gaelic) had always emphasized the importance of transmitting and performing songs *exactly* as they had been learned. It must therefore have been very disturbing when recordings revealed how often, in fact, songs exhibited variation and change. Today, music scholars and performers are more comfortable with the idea that change is constant and that cultural expressions have always changed and morphed in response to personal and communal factors, sometimes consciously, sometimes not. But in the early twentieth century, scholars clearly interpreted change and variation as cultural decline rather than part of a normal, constant cultural process. In response, they began collecting songs, among other cultural expressions, in an effort to preserve regional cultures before they died out.

Historian Ian McKay argues that a particular form of antimodernism and romanticism was at play in Nova Scotia in the early twentieth century, which he calls “Innocence”:

Innocence emerged in the period from 1920 to 1950 as a kind of mythomoteur, a set of fused and elaborated myths that provided Nova Scotians with an overall framework of meaning, a new way of imagining their community, a new core of a hegemonic liberal common sense. . . . Nova Scotia’s heart, its true essence, resided in the primitive, the rustic, the unspoiled, the picturesque, the quaint, the unchanging: in all those pre-modern things and traditions that seemed outside the rapid flow of change in the twentieth century.<sup>19</sup>

Other provinces might have emphasized identities rooted in scientific discovery, industrial expansion, and cosmopolitanism, but not Nova Scotia, as Muise and Semple delineate in their history of Nova Scotia tourism in this book. McKay’s conception of Innocence certainly informed many song-collecting efforts in Nova Scotia, including those specifically aimed at collecting Gaelic song and those that extended into the 1960s.

Celticist Ken Nilsen and ethnomusicologist Stephanie Conn have provided helpful histories of Gaelic song collecting in Nova Scotia.<sup>20</sup> Among the first collectors was John Lorne Campbell (1906–96), a fluent Gaelic learner

who lived at various points on several islands in the Scottish Hebrides. While living on the Isle of Barra, he undertook two research trips to Cape Breton, one in 1932 and a second in 1937. He recorded about one hundred songs on forty-three wax cylinders,<sup>21</sup> the most common recording technology of the time. Unfortunately, their soft surfaces, valued for their ability to record sound waves as grooves, also meant they could easily be damaged and worn out after being played only a few times. They are also subject to mould damage. His recordings, which he took back to Scotland with him, are therefore not only difficult to access but quite poor in sound quality. Fortunately, Campbell was aware of the physical deterioration of the recordings and had them transcribed into musical notation by Seamas Ennis of Ireland. As we would expect of an early collector, Campbell's primary interest was in collecting Gaelic songs from Scotland, particularly the Isle of Barra, that had survived in Cape Breton. He was not interested in collecting newly composed Cape Breton songs, nor was he interested in the songs of communities settled by Gaels from elsewhere in Scotland. Sixty of the songs he collected ultimately wound up in *Songs Remembered in Exile*, published more than fifty years after his initial field trips. His collection is housed at Canna House in Scotland.

Helen Creighton (1899–1989) of Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, began collecting Gaelic songs as early as 1933 when she first visited Cape Breton. However, she didn't have access to a recorder until 1943, so her earliest song-collecting efforts were documented via musical transcriptions. Creighton was an extremely influential and prolific maritime song collector. She was well known throughout Canada thanks to her CBC radio show as well as her many books, and she helped popularize such songs as "Farewell to Nova Scotia."<sup>22</sup> Although she was not a Gaelic speaker, she published *Gaelic Songs in Nova Scotia* with the assistance of Scottish-born and native Gaelic-speaking scholar C. I. N. MacLeod. Creighton's collections are housed at the Nova Scotia Archives, the Museum of History in Ottawa, and the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

A great deal of Gaelic song collecting took place in the 1940s and 1950s, continuing at a reduced rate into the 1960s and 1970s, spearheaded especially by Americans with no Gaelic fluency. As this book's editors contend in the introduction, the definition of Cape Breton Island keeps changing, and I would argue that this period of collecting marks a shift in understanding the provincial Gaelic community from a Scottish diaspora preserving old country songs to one having its own Nova Scotian identity. Collecting activities were certainly aided by the creation of new road and tourism infrastructure,

including the opening of the Canso Causeway in 1955 and the completion of the Trans-Canada Highway, as noted by Muise and Semple in this volume. American collectors included Sidney Robertson Cowell (1903–95, collecting songs in 1939 and the early 1950s, housed at the Folklife Archives of the Smithsonian Institution), Laura Boulton (1899–1980, collecting Cape Breton Gaelic songs in 1941, housed at Columbia University, the Library of Congress, and the Indiana University Archives of Traditional Music), MacEdward Leach (1897–1967, collecting Gaelic songs in 1949–51, housed at the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive, the American Folklife Centre at the Library of Congress, and at the National Museum of History in Ottawa), Diane Hamilton (a pseudonym for Diane Guggenheim, 1924–91, collecting Gaelic songs in 1954 for the Elektra label and released on the LP *Nova Scotia Folk Music from Cape Breton*, EKL 23, 1954), and Ralph Rinzler (1934–94, collecting in 1964 for the Newport Folk Foundation, housed at the Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections at the Smithsonian Institution).

In addition to these American collectors, Scottish-born Celticist Charles Dunn (1915–2006) began collecting Cape Breton Gaelic songs and folklore in 1941, and Lilius Toward, a Cape Breton lawyer who does not seem to have spoken Gaelic, collected local Gaelic and Acadian songs in 1950. A St. Francis Xavier University graduate student from Tiree in Scotland, Kathleen MacKinnon (dates unknown), collected Gaelic songs as part of her thesis research in the early 1960s.<sup>23</sup> The Museum of Man in Ottawa—now the Museum of History—commissioned Gordon MacLennan (1931–92), originally from Glasgow and a fluent Gaelic speaker, to collect Gaelic expressions from across Canada (notably Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Ontario, and Saskatchewan) from 1968 to 1974, while he was a professor of Celtic at the University of Ottawa.<sup>24</sup>

Unfortunately for the Nova Scotia Gaelic community, most Gaelic song collectors housed their field recordings outside of Nova Scotia. Some, like Creighton and Campbell, published a portion of their songs (although, in the case of Campbell, only decades after his collecting efforts) so that at least notated versions were accessible to the communities from which the songs were collected, although notated transcriptions are a poor substitute for actual audio recordings. Clearly, Gaelic song collecting had been undertaken for the benefit of outsiders interested in studying a culture that was

presumably rapidly disappearing. It was not designed for the benefit of the Gaels themselves.

Around the 1970s, a new wave of American scholars began collecting Nova Scotian Gaelic songs, but rather than making short collecting excursions as earlier collectors had, these scholars actually relocated to Nova Scotia for years, often permanently. They also became fluent Gaelic speakers. Their song recordings remain in the province and have often been used in Gaelic language and cultural revitalization efforts, such as workshops and courses (although access to the original field recordings varies). These scholars include John Shaw (b. 1944; his collecting activities extended over several years, starting in 1964), Seumas Watson (b. 1949–d. 2018; moved to Nova Scotia in 1973), and Ken Nilsen (b. 1947–d. 2012; moved to Nova Scotia in 1984). Rosemary (Hutchinson) McCormack (birth date unknown), originally from Scotland but a long-time resident of Cape Breton, also collected Gaelic cultural materials, producing several commercial releases of Gaelic field recordings (under the label B&R Heritage Enterprises).

Some local Gaelic speakers also collected cultural materials, including Mother St. Margaret of Scotland (Sister Margaret Beaton, 1893–1975), who founded the Beaton Institute (formerly Cape Bretoniana) in 1957 and who arranged for many local Gaelic speakers to make recordings for the collection. The Beaton Institute has subsequently received (and continues to receive) dozens of personal collections and now houses over four thousand video and audio tapes, many of which document Gaelic culture. Sister Margaret MacDonnell (1920–) founded the Cape Breton Gaelic Folklore Collection at St. Francis Xavier University and published *The Emigrant Experience*.<sup>25</sup>

## Sources of Nova Scotia Gaelic Song

Published song collections provide one means of accessing Nova Scotia Gaelic song repertoire, although they really only represent a fraction of the repertoire once known and practised in Nova Scotia.<sup>26</sup> Collectors, of course, were often selective in their collecting. I have already noted that John Lorne Campbell was only interested in collecting Barra songs that had survived in Cape Breton; he was not interested in songs from any other part of Gaelic-speaking Scotland, nor did he make a point of collecting Nova Scotia–composed Gaelic songs.<sup>27</sup> Helen Creighton noted that she would quietly erase songs she found inappropriate.<sup>28</sup> Of course, as a non-Gaelic speaker, she wouldn't really know

the difference when it came to Gaelic songs, but her language limitations meant that she was constrained to collecting whatever her informants decided to share with her. Certainly, collectors could not always get their informants to provide what they wanted. Charles Dunn found it difficult to elicit certain types of songs, notably satirical songs, from informants.<sup>29</sup>

Stephanie Conn has also noted that for some not entirely understood reason, the majority of Gaelic song collectors collecting in the mid-twentieth century gravitated to the North Shore of Cape Breton, recording many of the same singers and even the same songs.<sup>30</sup> Since Cape Breton Gaels had settled through chain migration such that particular Cape Breton communities were strongly associated with specific regions of Scotland (rather than representing a mix of Scottish communities), these collectors wound up mostly recording songs whose origins were in the Scottish Isles of Lewis and Harris, Protestant regions of the Hebrides. As a result, the North Shore singers and their repertoire have come to have a disproportionate impact on the documented Gaelic song repertoire of Nova Scotia and are now, at a time of cultural revitalization, having a significant effect on the repertoire that's being revived and reintroduced to the local Gaelic song community.

Singers themselves were also selective in what they offered to record for collectors. We don't have a lot of information about singers' selection processes, but they would usually only have a few short opportunities to record songs for collectors, regardless of the size of their repertoires. This was, in some measure, the result of the cost of recording (tape, in the mid-twentieth century, was quite expensive and not readily available; collectors came with a certain amount of tape, which dictated the extent of their recording activities). It was also the result of collectors who made relatively brief collecting trips and did not, therefore, have much time to collect large repertoires. And in part it was due to collectors' desires to record a cross section of singers rather than focus on a single singer. Later, some collectors focused on eliciting the full repertoire of particular singers (John Shaw, for example, documented the songs of Lauchie MacLellan of Broad Cove<sup>31</sup>) in order to provide a better understanding of the extent of a single singer's repertoire.

Collection activities have slowed considerably of late, partly due to the precipitous decline in native Gaelic-speaking tradition bearers, partly because so much was done in the past, and partly because funding agencies' priorities have changed, making less money available for collecting projects. Attention is increasingly being turned to ways of making existing collections more



accessible, particularly through digital media.<sup>32</sup> There is no question that the digitization of archival recordings is a necessary and valuable endeavour. Magnetic tape disintegrates over time, particularly if it is not kept in a low-humidity environment with stable temperatures (unfortunately, not the condition of many basements and attics). But digitization is a time-consuming and therefore expensive process, and it does require some specialized equipment (such as reel-to-reel players). Moreover, file formats and computer systems are constantly changing, and it is even more time-consuming and expensive to have to keep updating the file formats of previously digitized materials. Archives do use a standard, stable format that is meant to remain viable despite other changes to computers, but it is not one that the average person with the average computer can easily play. When someone wants to make a collection accessible online, they are forced to convert the archival file into a format that anyone can access. Another challenge is that digital tools such as websites need constant maintenance and updating and are vulnerable to hacking and other threats, as we know from the significant damage caused to the Gaelstream servers at St. Francis Xavier University in 2018.<sup>33</sup> Scholars, archivists, and computer programmers still have much work to do to determine how best to preserve archival collections digitally in a sustainable and financially viable way while also making them accessible to the wider public.

Another valuable source of songs, although requiring more effort and time to access, is newspapers. Many Nova Scotia newspapers, notably the *Casket* (Antigonish), the *Eastern Chronicle* (New Glasgow), and the *Pictou News*, published Gaelic columns and songs. Of particular importance is *Mac-Talla*, edited and published by Jonathan G. MacKinnon in Sydney, 1892–1904. The entire newspaper was in Gaelic, even the advertisements. It was the longest-running Gaelic newspaper anywhere in the world. Many songs can be found published in its pages as well. Newspapers sometimes published newly composed songs but just as often published local favourites. A growing number of these newspapers are being digitized, although it can be challenging to find songs in their digitized pages.<sup>34</sup> It can also be difficult to research these songs, since little contextual information tends to be provided in newspapers, and contributors' and composers' names are sometimes obscured through the use of initials or pseudonyms.<sup>35</sup>

Manuscript collections of Nova Scotia Gaelic songs also exist. Two of the most significant, for example, are the Ridge Manuscripts housed in Special Collections in the Angus L. Macdonald Library of St. Francis Xavier

University. These manuscripts include a number of compositions by Allan “the Ridge” MacDonald (1794–1868) and his son, Alexander (1823–1904) but also include songs collected by various family members. Almost half of the Angus Stephen Beaton (1888–1967) collection consists of local songs and poetry from Scotland popularly sung in Nova Scotia, while the remainder of the collection is made up of locally composed Nova Scotia songs. A copy of the collection can be accessed through the Beaton Institute.

There are also numerous Gaelic song scrapbooks to be found in archives such as the Beaton Institute, usually consisting of songs cut out of newspapers or carefully written out (either copied from a newspaper or taken down from the singing of family and friends). These scrapbooks not only document songs but suggest which songs appealed most to people and indicate which songs may have been part of the active repertoire at particular times.

Prior to the digitization of archival collections and the creation of websites and online databases where they can be freely accessed, commercial recordings helped make traditional Nova Scotia Gaelic songs more accessible, particularly in the 1990s. Although Cape Breton fiddlers had been making commercial recordings since the late 1920s and archival recordings of Gaelic song began to be made in the 1930s, the earliest commercial recording of Nova Scotia Gaelic songs wasn’t made until 1954 with Diane (Guggenheim) Hamilton’s LP, *Nova Scotia Folk Music from Cape Breton*, and not again until 1976, with *The Music of Cape Breton Volume 1: Gaelic Tradition in Cape Breton*, recorded by John Shaw and Rosemary Hutchinson (later McCormack) for the UK label Topic Records.<sup>36</sup> Both albums featured local “stars” in their respective traditions, but none of the singers or musicians was a professional, commercial artist.

The growing popularity of Celtic music globally in the late 1980s and through the 1990s resulted in several successful Cape Breton recording artists, most of whom included at least the occasional Gaelic song on their albums: the Rankin Family, the Barra MacNeils, Natalie MacMaster, Ashley MacIsaac, and Slàinte Mhath, to name a few. There were also other singers with more local profiles who made albums that included Gaelic songs, such as Mary and Rita Rankin, Lewis MacKinnon, Neil MacPhee, and Catriona Parsons. Many of these artists had been influenced by John Allan Cameron, the “godfather of Celtic music,” who had achieved considerable success nationally as the host of *The Ceilidh Show*, which aired in the 1970s just before *Hockey Night in Canada* on the CBC, and later as the host of *The John Allan Cameron Show*.

While he never achieved much radio play, his TV appearances made him a household name and an influential figure in the Cape Breton music scene. Although not a fluent Gaelic speaker himself, he did incorporate a number of Gaelic songs into his many albums.<sup>37</sup> More recent artists have also released professional recordings of Gaelic songs, including Còig, Anita MacDonald and Ben Miller, Joanne MacIntyre, NicNeil (the MacNeil Sisters), and Fàrsan.

Arguably, the most important Gaelic recording artist in Nova Scotia is Mary Jane Lamond. While most other artists recorded the occasional Gaelic song, Lamond has recorded Gaelic songs exclusively on her six albums (released 1994–2012).<sup>38</sup> She is also a fluent learner of the language, whereas many Nova Scotian singers who have included Gaelic songs on their albums are not fluent, learning their songs phonetically. Her albums vary in style, from traditional to contemporary pop rock. She meticulously researches all her songs, acquiring some from archival holdings and others from friends in the community, and she focuses on Nova Scotia repertoire.<sup>39</sup>

It is difficult to catalogue all the Nova Scotia albums that incorporate Gaelic songs, since a number are self-produced or include only one Gaelic song among a number of English songs or instrumental tunes. However, one is worth noting: the CBC production *Còmhla Cruinn* (*Gathered Together*, 2002), which contains a variety of Gaelic songs performed by a contemporary generation of Gaelic singers. It differs from other recordings that feature either historical field recordings or more polished studio productions in that it is professionally recorded with clear sound, but the singers are recorded “live off the floor” and perform in a traditional, rather than arranged, manner. Most of the repertoire consists of milling songs,<sup>40</sup> but a variety of genres is represented. The CD is accompanied by extensive liner notes about the Gaelic song tradition in Nova Scotia.

Although I have focused my attention on cataloguing some of the significant and distinctive Gaelic song recordings made in Nova Scotia, it is important to recognize that Scottish recordings have also played a role in the Nova Scotia Gaelic song scene. Stephanie Conn observes that every year, she hears Nova Scotians singing Gaelic songs they acquired from Scottish recordings.<sup>41</sup> For example, Mary Jane Lamond recorded the song “Seallaibh Curraigh Eòghainn” on her album *Làn Dùil* (*Full of hope*) in 1999. Lamond noted that it likely became known in Cape Breton after a version was released on the influential album *Music from the Western Isles*, a collection of archival recordings from the School of Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh.

That earlier recording was released as an LP in 1971 as part of the Scottish Tradition series and rereleased as a CD in 1999. It is also possible to find Nova Scotia Gaelic songs on the albums of some Scottish recording artists.

Gaelic song recordings forge and reinforce valuable social connections, since listeners often learn songs from recordings and then perform them at live song events such as milling frolics or ceilidhs. Moreover, because recordings are material objects rather than ephemeral performances, they can transcend the limits of time and geography. Thus recordings reinforce transatlantic relationships, with Nova Scotia recordings heard in Scotland and vice versa. Moreover, Nova Scotia Gaelic song recordings circulate among speakers and learners across North America and beyond. Recording artists will often learn songs from archival recordings of singers long gone or record songs by composers still remembered but no longer living, bringing singers (and listeners) together regardless of where they live and connecting singers and their audiences with a historical community. Some recording artists even incorporate older tradition bearers into their recordings, as Mary Jane Lamond did with Margaret MacLean on her album *Suas e!*, keeping her voice alive after Margaret herself passed away.

## Nova Scotia Gaelic Song Compositions

The Nova Scotian Gaelic song repertoire is rich, diverse, and extensive and includes thousands of songs.<sup>42</sup> Scottish immigrants brought songs with them, and many were retained in Nova Scotia, some long after they were forgotten in Scotland. But Nova Scotian Gaels did not simply maintain Scottish songs; rather, they were actively involved in creating new Gaelic repertoire. John Shaw has provided an overview of the early history of Gaelic song composition in Nova Scotia and compared it to compositions of the same era in Scotland, identifying typical themes, stylistic features, and their development over time.<sup>43</sup> Many songs explicitly exalt the Gaelic language—like the song with which this chapter opens—and call on Gaels to continue using it, asserting the power of song to resist language decline.<sup>44</sup> Notwithstanding various efforts to find “ancient” Gaelic songs in Nova Scotia, many collectors wound up with Nova Scotia-made Gaelic songs amid their collections.

With the decline in Gaelic speakers, relatively few Nova Scotia songs are part of the active repertoire, and very few Gaelic songs are being created in Nova Scotia today. However, singers regularly seek out songs not part of the

active repertoire in order to reinvigorate their own repertoires and, by extension, the community's. Thus, between the creation of new repertoire and the constantly evolving active repertoire, the Nova Scotian Gaelic song corpus remains flexible and varying, as healthy traditions do.

Numerous examples of Nova Scotian Gaelic song compositions can be found scattered in various published Gaelic song collections and on recordings. A few collections dedicated to local compositions and bards have also been published, such as McLellan's *Failte Cheap Breatuinn (A Cape Breton Welcome)*, which features the songs of Inverness County bards; Rankin's *Às a Bhràighe (From the Braes)*, featuring the compositions of Allan "the Ridge" MacDonald (1794–1868); *Smeòrach nan Cnoc 's nan Gleann (The Songster of the Hills and the Glens)*; *Guthan Prìseil (Precious Voices)*; and the collected works of Malcolm H. Gillis (1856–1929) drawn from the earlier publication by the same name offering poetry and songs by a variety of bards from South-west Margaree. The MacKenzies, a family of bards from central Cape Breton, included some of their compositions in the history of their parish, and their songs were later compiled in two separate volumes. Margaret MacDonnell and Michael Newton have published anthologies of Gaelic songs created in North America, including songs made in Nova Scotia.<sup>45</sup>

## Performance and Transmission

As many have observed, Gaelic song permeated the lives of Gaels in Nova Scotia until the mid-twentieth century, at which point socio-economic changes, including urbanization and industrialization; the introduction of electricity, telephones, and television; improved roads and increasingly accessible cars; and increasingly accessible recording technologies and players changed the manner, frequency, and venues of social interaction, entertainment, and transmission of news. The Gaelic language was already being actively repressed. It was deliberately excluded from educational curricula, and schoolchildren were punished for speaking Gaelic instead of English.<sup>46</sup> Even a Gaelic accent in English was deemed a marker of "backwardness." The Gaelic language declined precipitously as Gaelic communities emptied, their residents moving to the island's urban areas to take advantage of coal and steel industry jobs and to off-island industrial centres such as Boston and Detroit. At the same time that out-migration reduced the overall number of Gaelic speakers, Gaels were absorbing the lessons that Gaelic offered no particular economic

advantage and that discriminatory practices meant that it could actually inhibit both social and economic opportunities. Gaelic-speaking parents deliberately raised English-speaking children in the hopes of ensuring they had every advantage possible.

Prior to industrialization and urbanization, throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries, Gaelic singing could be heard accompanying all manner of work activities, accompanying dance, in the church,<sup>47</sup> and at social occasions. Because of the frequency of singing in social and family contexts, people were able to learn songs through oral transmission. Stephanie Conn has written eloquently about the role of memory and social interaction in the performance and transmission of Gaelic song in Cape Breton.<sup>48</sup> She argues that songs and singing are connected to at least three different levels of memory: communal memory of heritage (i.e., “This song is part of the tradition of my people”), memory of past social events at which the song was sung (i.e., “I remember all the times I’ve heard this song and who was there”), and individual memory (i.e., “I remember the words and melody of this song”). Although a singer may have learned a song orally, he or she may also have a collection of material goods—including recordings (both amateur and professional), published song collections, scrapbooks of lyrics, photographs, and so on—linked to the song. These material objects may seem designed to help the singer be exact in his or her learning of a song, since the singer can refer to the words in a book or hear the melody on a recording. But Conn argues that rather than limit a singer’s individuality in performance, these items can provide the historical and cultural context of a particular song and of Gaelic song as a whole. Moreover, a performance of a traditional song isn’t just about remembering the past. Rather, each performance will influence the future in some way as well. For example, singing a song publicly that hasn’t been performed for many years could result in that same song being learned by others or requested at future events that might not otherwise have included that song. A singer’s individual style of performance can affect future performances through imitation or even through rejection. To truly “know” a song requires not just reproducing it accurately—whether from the memory of a performance, a recording, or a book—but also the ability to draw on one’s personal experiences and memories.

Although “traditional” cultures are often represented as being primarily oral—and this is true of the characterization of Gaelic song in Nova Scotia as well<sup>49</sup>—Gaelic singers have often made use of published and written records of

Gaelic song to assist them in remembering and learning repertoire.<sup>50</sup> Michael Newton has documented that Gaelic newspapers were known in Canada from as early as 1840, and their importance is attested to in numerous Gaelic songs that praise newspaper editors and columnists.<sup>51</sup> One of the aspects that makes Gaelic song and singing so interesting to study and experience is the dynamic interplay between the oral and the written. Although no one in the Nova Scotian Gaelic community would accept the performance of a song learned exclusively from written sources, they do accept that written sources have a role to play in the song tradition. Published collections, personal scrapbooks, and newspaper song columns do not simply document the lyrics (and sometimes the music), thereby making it easier for a singer to recall them. Rather, they document a whole cultural history embedded in songs' lyrics, they hint at the importance and prevalence of singing in Gaelic communities, and they signal the songs that people felt were worth preserving.

In traditional Nova Scotian Gaelic culture, songs and singing were not taught in formal lessons. Rather, the transmission of songs and singing generally occurred much more informally through repeated encounters with songs and singing in various contexts, supplemented by material objects such as books and recordings. One of the pre-eminent contexts for social Gaelic singing was the *ceilidh*.<sup>52</sup> "Ceilidh" means "visit," although it has come to mean a party or a concert among English speakers. Ceilidhs were once common, although they have declined with the advent of electricity, the telephone, radio, television, computers, and the internet. Ceilidhs provided opportunities for people to share their news with each other and to make their own entertainment. Everyone at a ceilidh would contribute in some way, such as through a story, song, tune, or dance. Often the evening's progression was quite organic, such that one person might tell the history of an ancestor's arrival to the area, which would remind someone of a song, which would inspire a tune, and so on.

As recording technologies became more affordable and accessible, starting around the 1950s, the Gaels themselves began making their own recordings of their songs and expressive culture, often at ceilidhs. While some of these house recordings have made their way into archives such as the Beaton Institute, there are untold numbers still held in private collections. Many have been duplicated and shared with friends and family. Some have become quite well known within the community. In this way, Nova Scotia Gaels asserted agency over their own song tradition, choosing what to record and circulating

recordings, maintaining their collections in community as well as of use to community.

## Value and Use of Collections Today

A great many hours and dollars were spent collecting Gaelic songs in Nova Scotia over the twentieth century with the hope of preserving what was perceived to be a dying language and culture. Were they successful? Now that we have them, what do we do with them? I would argue that there are two basic ways that Gaelic song collections are being used in Nova Scotia today: one is pragmatic and instrumental, and the other is ideological.

The pragmatic and instrumental purposes to which Gaelic song collections can be put are likely fairly self-evident and unsurprising. Songs offer a valuable tool in language learning and cultural transmission. Suzanne Bilello of the New York office of UNESCO observes,

The death of a language inevitably leads to the permanent loss of oral traditions and expressions. However, it is these oral expressions themselves and their performance in public that best help to safeguard a language rather than dictionaries, grammars and databases. Languages live in songs and stories, riddles and rhymes and so the protection of languages and the transmission of oral traditions and expressions go hand and hand.<sup>53</sup>

Bilello's point is well evidenced in Nova Scotia if we consider how important songs are in inspiring people to learn Gaelic. First, songs galvanize people to learn the language. New students often describe being inspired to start taking Gaelic-language classes after hearing a compelling Gaelic song. Songs are also used to engage language learners, to enrich the language classroom, and to break up drier lessons pertaining to, say, grammar or involving extensive repetition and drilling. Gaelic songs help language learners learn and recall vocabulary and grammar while working on their pronunciation, all in a culturally relevant form. Gaelic songs document Gaelic culture, history, and genealogy. We can learn more than language and grammar from them: we can learn the way that Gaels lived and about their beliefs and values.

More interesting, perhaps, but more difficult to discuss are the ideological uses to which Gaelic song collections are put. Gaelic song texts on their own mean little. They are significant when understood within their cultural



context. But what is that cultural context? Music anthropologist Alan Merriam proposed an elegant and simple framework for understanding music cultures as systems involving the interaction of three components: sounds, behaviours (or actions), and beliefs.<sup>54</sup> The songs themselves are the sounds, and behaviours include both the act of song collecting and the pragmatic acts of using song collections. Gaelic song and Gaelic song collections play a significant role in defining and articulating Gaelic values and beliefs not only through song lyrics themselves but also through the very existence and body of Gaelic song collections. I want to suggest that song collections are used to shape and articulate three key Gaelic values that are deemed significant to a contemporary Nova Scotian Gaelic identity: the value of artistic creation, the value of hospitality and inclusivity, and the value of family lineage and legacy.

The extraordinary depth and breadth of Gaelic song collections symbolize the importance of artistic and literary creativity in Gaelic culture, as does the transmission of large numbers of songs over generations: the assumption is that only people who value musical and verbal artistry would produce such a large number of songs over such a long period of time and across wide territories—spanning even oceans. Indeed, the twentieth-century Scottish Gaelic literary giant Sorley MacLean was adamant about the significance and quality of Gaelic literature: “I am convinced that Scottish Gaelic song is the chief artistic glory of the Scots, and of all people of Celtic speech, and one of the greatest artistic glories of Europe.”<sup>55</sup> Moreover, songs permeated daily life. They were not relegated to a few special contexts. Instead, songs accompanied almost every form of manual and household labour imaginable while also playing a central role at social events such as *ceilidhs*. Songs were created to document major events, honour beloved family members, tease friends, articulate religious and spiritual sentiments, and express gratitude for all that the song makers and singers had. Not only were songs sung by Gaels at all social levels, but they were also created by all manner of Gaels, not just those deemed to be skilled bards.<sup>56</sup> *Puirt-a-beul* (mouth music), for example, was generally created by average people.<sup>57</sup> Milling songs were traditionally extemporized on the spot by participants, and only later did their texts become fixed. In short, the size of the song repertoire, its duration, its use in daily life, and its creation by Gaels from all social echelons are taken as evidence of the value given to songs and, by extension, artistic creation.

Second is the value of hospitality and inclusivity. Traditionally, Gaels saw generosity and hospitality as critical virtues that families and community

members must practice. Visiting formed an important part of Gaelic culture historically and is being nurtured again through formal interventions such as Gaelic Affairs' Cum Sìos ("keep down," a phrase used to invite guests to sit and stay awhile) initiative, part of the Bun is Bàrr ("root and branch") mentoring program. The Cum Sìos program is designed to encourage and support Gaelic learners to visit Gaelic-speaking elders and fluent speakers in the community. Ceilidh culture meant that anyone could visit anyone else at any time and expect a warm welcome and a bite to eat. A ceilidh could involve a single neighbour, or it could involve a large group of people and turn into a party. Ceilidh culture was emphatically inclusive, and reciprocal sharing of songs and stories was expected, regardless of the participants' vocal qualities or musical skills. Thus, the sharing of songs was practised by most community members with considerable frequency. Although many Gaelic songs are meant to be sung solo, many more are meant to be sung communally, with everyone present encouraged to join the lead singer on the choruses. By sharing songs in social contexts such as ceilidhs, songs were transmitted across communities and generations. The significant size of the collected Gaelic song repertoire, the quantity of Gaelic song recordings, and the very structure of Gaelic songs give evidence of a generous and hospitable culture. Without a spirit of sharing and hospitality, it would not have been possible for such a large song repertoire to have been retained and collected. Songs and singing continue to be used to form and reinforce social bonds and to function as a fundamental element in many Gaelic social interactions.

Finally, there is the value of family lineage and legacy. Using patronymics, Gaels can often trace their families back multiple generations. Many Nova Scotia Gaels are acutely aware of the identity of their Scottish ancestors, when they immigrated to Nova Scotia, and where they settled. It is not uncommon to find modern Gaels living on the lands or even in the homes of their ancestors. Songs help document and preserve family lineages. Some Gaels can name bards in their families. Others can identify songs made by a family ancestor. Yet others know songs that tell of a family ancestor. In other situations, Gaels will sing a song learned from a family member, perhaps one passed down through the family. It is as important to acknowledge a song's lineage as it is to acknowledge an individual's family lineage by identifying its source and history. Gaelic learners will often make a point of learning songs from the communities of their ancestors, since these will typically represent community dialects as well as local references. Songs, by virtue of their intangibility, easily

travel across time and place and, in so doing, help connect people of today with their pasts, both locally and abroad.

These three values—artistry/creativity, hospitality, and honouring family and musical lineages—are key qualities of a contemporary Nova Scotian Gaelic identity. Songs are used to teach learners about what it means to be a Gael, and they also serve to shape, articulate, and enact these values. These values are articulated in song texts. But more importantly, these values are rooted in the very existence of a large body of songs and the act of singing them in culturally relevant contexts. As music educator Christopher Small argues,

The act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies. They are to be found not only between those organized sounds which are conventionally thought of as being the stuff of musical meaning but also between the people who are taking part, in whatever capacity, in the performance; and they model, or stand as metaphor for, ideal relationships as the participants in the performance imagine them to be: relationships between person and person, between individual and society, between humanity and the natural world and even perhaps the supernatural world.<sup>58</sup>

Both singing and the act of song collecting can be understood as “musicking,” in Small’s conception of the term, enacting relationships and values that Gaels idealize as central to a Nova Scotian Gaelic identity.

## Conclusions

The twentieth century was a century of song collecting in Nova Scotia, echoing a global movement that sought to preserve fragile traditions from the onslaught of capitalism, urbanization, globalization, and modernization. Ian McKay argues that most Nova Scotia folk collectors were middle-class urbanites who had rather classist views of the folk from whom they collected. They saw the folk as unwitting carriers of tradition. The middle-class collectors believed themselves to be uniquely capable of recognizing the value of the folk’s traditions and of preserving them. But what this history of Gaelic song collecting reveals is that the profile, methods, and aims of collectors changed over time and that collectors could never be characterized homogenously.

There were collectors who spoke no Gaelic, and there were fluent Gaelic-speaking collectors. There were collectors who made short collecting trips from the US and Scotland, and there were collectors who came from Nova Scotia or who moved permanently to the province. Moreover, those early collections—no matter how problematic the methods or framing of their creators—are now being used by members of the Nova Scotia Gaelic community themselves to strengthen traditional culture and language. It is unfortunate that efforts to make these collections more broadly available are difficult to fund. Although Gaelic song books were published in significant numbers from the 1960s to the 1980s, and although digitization projects proliferated in the 1990s and early 2000s, it can be challenging to find funding for digitization projects today.

Historically, Gaels were subject to extensive, long-term, and pervasive marginalization, disenfranchisement, and colonization, first in Scotland, then in Nova Scotia.<sup>59</sup> Gaels were negatively characterized as poor, uneducated, and savage, marked by the Gaelic language and by a Gaelic accent in English, leading many Gaels to stop transmitting Gaelic to their children. And yet extensive collecting activities in the twentieth century documented and preserved an exceptionally rich, deep, and varied song repertoire. Ironically, most urges to document Gaelic language and culture did not come from respect or the desire to preserve them. Rather, the collectors saw the Gaels as a vanishing culture, naturally failing in competition with the supposedly superior Anglo-Saxon culture and English language. Happily, regardless of their motives, their collections now provide a strong foundation for revitalization.

## Notes

1. Thanks to Michael Newton for suggesting this song. It can be found in a collection of Nova Scotia Gaelic verse: Macleod, *Bàrdachd à Albainn Nuaidh*.
2. Dembling, “Gaelic in Canada.”
3. Macleod, *Bàrdachd à Albainn Nuaidh*; Creighton and MacLeod, *Gaelic Songs in Nova Scotia*.
4. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 125.
5. While Gaelic communities could be found across Canada at one time, there are few studies of Gaelic song, music, and dance outside of Nova Scotia, although folklorist Margaret Bennett has made a point of studying other areas. See Bennett, “Codroy Valley Milling Frolic”; Bennett, *Last Stronghold*;

Bennett, “Gaelic Song in Eastern Canada”; Bennett, *Oatmeal and the Catechism*. But also see MacPherson, “Like a Peeling on the Water.” I resist limiting this discussion to Cape Breton even though the island is typically seen as the heart of the Nova Scotia Gaeltacht (Gaelic community), since significant and related Gaelic communities also existed in the eastern regions of the Nova Scotia mainland.

6. A useful tool is the recently released Nova Scotia Gaelic Song Index (<https://dasg.ac.uk/LIL/>), which provides metadata about more than six thousand Gaelic songs known in Nova Scotia, with information about where each can be found.
7. For one exception, see Blakely, “Music in Nova Scotia,” who writes, “The first music to be published in Nova Scotia was *The Nova Scotia Songster* in February 1836. This selection of Scotch, English, Irish, Love, Naval and Comic Songs had been published at Pictou by James Dawson, an enterprising merchant there, and father of Sir William Dawson, famous as the principal of McGill University. In 1831, James Dawson had decided to publish a new selection of Church Music of about 350 pages. ‘The Harmonium: A Collection of Sacred Music adapted for the use of churches in British North America’ appeared in 1836 or 1837 and proved sufficiently popular for a new enlarged third edition to be published in 1849 by James Dawson & Sons” (226–27).
8. For example, research into the nineteenth-century Nova Scotia bookselling business of James Dawson reveals booklists featuring many Scottish (rather than Nova Scotia) song publications clearly aimed at his Scottish immigrant customers. MacDonald and Vogan, “James Dawson of Pictou.”
9. Take, as an example, Alexander MacLean Sinclair (1840–1924), who was an avid collector of Gaelic songs from both Scotland and Nova Scotia. However, he collected songs as texts. He published many volumes of Gaelic poetry, including *Clàrsach na Coille* (*Harp of the Forest*, self-published in 1881), which is perhaps the earliest published collection to include Nova Scotia Gaelic song compositions. He also published many song texts in east coast newspapers containing Gaelic columns. See Kenneth E. Nilsen’s biography of Alexander MacLean Sinclair in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, accessed 17 January 2024, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/sinclair\\_alexander\\_maclean\\_15E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/sinclair_alexander_maclean_15E.html); Michael Linkletter, “The Alexander Maclean Sinclair Papers in Nova Scotia Archives,” *Scotia: Interdisciplinary Journal of Scottish Studies* 27 (2003), reprinted by Nova Scotia Archives with permission of the author and the publisher, accessed 17 January 2024, <https://archives.novascotia.ca/gaelic/linkletter/>. At best, however, these songs would be accompanied by the name of the tune to which they would be sung.

10. Two useful studies analyzing the relationship between romantic nationalism and music are Bohlman, *Music of European Nationalism*; and Gelbart, *Invention of "Folk Music" and "Art Music."*
11. Much has been published on Herder and romantic nationalism. I suggest Wilson's article "Herder, Folklore and Romantic Nationalism" as an introduction to the topic from a folklore perspective.
12. McKay, *Quest of the Folk*, 10.
13. McKay, 11.
14. James, *Atlantic Celts*, 218.
15. McKay, *Quest of the Folk*, 15.
16. See Bohlman, *Music of European Nationalism*, esp. chap. 3.
17. McKay, "He Is More Picturesque," 20; McKay, *Quest of the Folk*; Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, esp. chap. 1.
18. Letter from Duncan Emrich, chief of the folklore section of the Library of Congress, to his superior, Harold Spivacke, proposing support for MacEdward Leach's collecting activities in Nova Scotia, 22 June 1949 (cited in MacEdward Leach and the Songs of Atlantic Canada website, <https://mmap.mun.ca/folk-songs-of-atlantic-canada/pages/leachsfildwork>). See Conn, "Carn Mor de Chlachan Beaga," 191.
19. McKay, *Quest of the Folk*, 30.
20. Nilsen, "Living Celtic Speech"; Conn, "Carn Mor de Chlachan Beaga."
21. Campbell, *Songs Remembered in Exile*, 2–3.
22. Helen Creighton Folklore Society, "Farewell to Nova Scotia / the Nova Scotia Song," <https://www.helencreighton.org/collection/farewell-to-nova-scotia-the-nova-scotia-song/>. For a critical analysis of Creighton's radio show, see Webb, "Cultural Intervention."
23. MacKinnon, "Short Study of the History and Traditions."
24. Falzett, "Scottish Gaelic Oral Tradition."
25. MacDonell, *Emigrant Experience*.
26. Published song collections include, for example, McLellan, *Failte Cheap Breatuinn*; Gillis and Nicholson, *Smeòrach nan Cnoc 's nan Gleann* (1939); Creighton and MacLeod, *Gaelic Songs in Nova Scotia*; Fergusson, *Fad Air Falbh As Innse Gall*; MacDonell, *Emigrant Experience*; MacKenzie, *MacKenzies' History of Christmas Island Parish*; Campbell, *Songs Remembered in Exile*; Shaw, *Brigh an Òrain*; Rankin, *As a' Bhràighe*; Landin, *Guthan Priseil*.
27. Campbell, *Songs Remembered in Exile*, 3.
28. McKay, *Quest of the Folk*, 115. See also Creighton, *Life in Folklore*, 162. For a critical analysis of Creighton's collecting, see McKay, "He Is More Picturesque."

29. Newton, "Interview with Prof Charles Dunn," <https://virtualgael.wordpress.com/2018/01/04/interview-with-prof-charles-dunn-of-harvard-in-2002/>.
30. Conn, "Carn Mor de Chlachan Beaga," 236–38.
31. Shaw, *Brìgh an Òrain*.
32. John Shaw's collection is available online through St. Francis Xavier University (<http://gaelstream.sfx.ca/>). MacEdward Leach's is also online, hosted by Memorial University (<https://mmap.mun.ca/folk-songs-of-atlantic-canada>), and Charles Dunn's collection was recently made available online through Harvard University, where he was a professor ([http://www.celtic.fas.harvard.edu/hcFolklore\\_Dunn.shtml](http://www.celtic.fas.harvard.edu/hcFolklore_Dunn.shtml)). The Beaton Institute at Cape Breton University also hosts a small selection of Gaelic songs as part of its virtual exhibit, "Music: Cape Breton's Diversity in Unity" (<http://beatoninstitutemusic.ca/>), and a growing number through its virtual archives (<https://beatoninstitute.com/>), notably through the "Stòras Gàidhlig Cheap Breatuinn" link. "An Drochaid Eadarainn" ("The Bridge between Us," <http://www.androchaid.ca/>, hosted by the Highland Village) is a different kind of resource that encourages community members to upload their own personal Gaelic collections and to use those of others, particularly for teaching and learning purposes. The Nova Scotia Gaelic Song Index can be used to locate songs in various collections, whether in audio archives, commercial recordings, published books, newspapers, or archival manuscripts (<https://dasg.ac.uk/LIL/>). The index is hosted by the Digital Archive of Scottish Gaelic (DASG), which also recently digitized a collection of recordings made by C. I. N. MacLeod, most of which were made in Nova Scotia (<https://dasg.ac.uk/about/history/en>).
33. Gaelstream was impacted when the computing systems of St. Francis Xavier University were hacked in late 2018, and it appears that some content is now missing, although efforts are underway to locate and restore it.
34. A digitized version of *Mac-Talla* is available from Sabhal Mòr Ostaig (<https://leabharlann.smo.uhi.ac.uk/archive/mactalla/?lang=en>) and DASG (<https://dasg.ac.uk/>). Various other historical Nova Scotia newspapers, including several Gaelic language papers, are available online through Nova Scotia Archives (<https://novascotia.ca/archives/newspapers/>).
35. The Nova Scotia Gaelic Song Index documents, for example, more than thirteen hundred songs in the pages of *Mac-Talla*. Whenever possible, it provides basic contextual information.
36. Volume 2 features instrumental music. McKinnon, "Fiddling to Fortune."
37. McDonald, "John Allan Cameron."

38. Lamond's albums include *Bho Thir Nan Craobh / From the Land of the Trees; Suas e!; Làn Dùil; Òrain Ghàidhlig / Gaelic Songs of Cape Breton; Stòras*; and, with Wendy MacIsaac, *Seinn*.
39. One might reasonably ask why an artist might choose to record and release songs in a language such as Gaelic, understood by so few people in the world. The answer to that question is complicated and beyond the scope of this chapter. However, it is a topic I've addressed in more detail elsewhere: Sparling, "One Foot on Either Side of the Chasm," <http://www.shimajournal.org/issues/v1n1/f.%20Sparling%20Shima%20v1n1.pdf>. It is also a topic addressed from a number of perspectives in Berger and Carroll, *Global Pop, Local Language*. Lamond's first album, *Bho Thir Nan Craobh (From the Land of Trees, 1994)* was produced by B&R Heritage Enterprises, headed by Rosemary McCormack. B&R Heritage Enterprises went on to produce a number of albums featuring Gaelic song, including *A Tribute to the North Shore Gaelic Singers* (1996), *Òr Cheap Breatuinn* (Cape Breton Gold, 1997), and *Tàlant nam Bàrd (Talent of the Bards, 1998)*, all of which consist exclusively of Gaelic song. B&R Heritage Enterprises also produced *Tir Mo Ghràidh (The Land I Love, n.d.)*, featuring various forms of Gaelic expressive culture including fiddling, storytelling, and song, and *Nollaig Chridheil: A Holiday Selection of Gaelic Songs, Music and Stories* (1995).
40. Milling songs, known as waulking songs in Scotland and as *òrain luaidh* in Gaelic, are one of the important genres of Gaelic song in Nova Scotia. Milling frolics are collective labour events at which, historically, women gathered to beat woven cloth in order to fluff and "full" wool fibres to preshrink it while making it warmer and more weather resistant. The participants took turns leading songs to accompany the repetitive and time-consuming work, with the group joining on choruses. Although there is no longer any material need to hold milling frolics, they continue to be held in Nova Scotia as a primary Gaelic cultural and social activity. They now include both men and women, and just about any song can be made into a milling song so long as there's a chorus that the group can collectively sing. For more on milling frolics, see Sparling, "Taking the Piss Out."
41. Conn, "Carn Mor de Chlachan Beaga," 218.
42. The Nova Scotia Gaelic Song Index, noted earlier, has indexed more than six thousand Gaelic songs known in Nova Scotia, a mix primarily of songs originally from Scotland and songs newly composed in Nova Scotia.
43. Shaw, "Brief Beginnings." For a much earlier article drawing attention to Canadian Gaelic songwriters and describing their basic characteristics, see Fraser, "Gaelic Folk-Songs of Canada."



44. Newton, *Seanchaidh na Coille*, 376.
45. McLellan, *Faile Cheap Breatuinn*; Rankin, *As a' Bhràighe*; Gillis and Nicholson, *Smeòrach nan Cnoc 's nan Gleann* (2004); Landin, *Guthan Priseil*; MacKenzie, *MacKenzies' History of Christmas Island Parish*; MacKenzie, MacKenzie, and MacKenzie, *Eairdsidh Sheumais Agus a Dhà Mhac*; MacKenzie and MacNeil, *Mar a b' àbhaist 's a' Ghleann*; MacDonell, *Emigrant Experience*; Newton, *Seanchaidh na Coille*.

Note also that folklorist Tom McKean's excellent ethnographic study of a Skye bard recently active describes the bard's role and creative processes and, although not about a Canadian bard, might offer insight into the Nova Scotian bardic tradition and compositional process: *Hebridean Song-Maker*; see also McKean, "Gaelic Songmaker's Response"; McKean, "Satire and the Exchange of Song."

46. For a helpful overview of Gaelic education in Nova Scotia, see McEwan, "Gaelic Education in Nova Scotia Schools," <https://gaelic.co/ns-gaelic-education/>.
47. There was a unique song tradition in the Gaelic Protestant churches of Nova Scotia that originated and is still practiced in Scotland. It involves "lining out" the psalms. A precentor would start a psalm, singing the opening words alone while the congregation figured out which psalm he was singing and to what tune. The congregation would then join in, singing the subsequent lines in slow, highly elaborated, and idiosyncratic ways, resulting in a distinctive heterophonic texture. Unfortunately, this practice has received little scholarly attention on either side of the Atlantic, although see Cowell, "Connection between the Precenting of Psalms"; Knudsen, "Ornamental Hymn/Psalm Singing"; Porter, "Northwest European Heterophony Type"; and Miller, "Oral Tradition Psalmody."
48. Conn, "Fitting between Present and Past."
49. Dunn, *Highland Settler*, 37; Campbell, *Songs Remembered in Exile*, 1; Rankin, *As a' Bhràighe*, 5.
50. Heather Sparling, "Transmission Processes in Cape Breton Gaelic Song Culture."
51. Newton, *Seanchaidh na Coille*, 376–80.
52. MacDonald, "Cape Breton Ceilidh"; see also Shaw, *Brigh an Òrain*, 14–15.
53. Bilello, "Statement on the Occasion." Thanks to Tiber Falzett for bringing my attention to Bilello's statement.
54. Merriam, *Anthropology of Music*, 32–33.
55. MacLean, "Old Songs and New Poetry," 106.
56. Newton, *Seanchaidh na Coille*, 13.

57. Sparling, *Reeling Roosters and Dancing Ducks*, 153.
58. Small, *Musicking*, 13.
59. Dorian, *Language Death*; Wardhaugh, *Languages in Competition*; MacKinnon, *Gaelic*; Newton, *Seanchaidh na Coille*, 32–40.

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## 9 Industrial Crisis and the Cape Breton Coal Miners at the End of the Long Twentieth Century, 1981–86

*Lachlan MacKinnon*

At the end of March 2020, Kameron Collieries announced the closure of the Donkin Mine—the last operating coal mine on Cape Breton Island. The American firm had been in crisis since the death of coal baron Chris Cline in a helicopter crash the previous summer, and executives blamed geological conditions for the decision.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the mine had been plagued by eleven rockfall incidents since the fall of 2017, raising safety concerns among miners, their families, and other community members.<sup>2</sup> Compounding the circumstances of the decision were the tremendous fluctuations in financial markets and travel disruptions prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected Canadian and American travel through the spring of that year. With the decision, 140 workers were laid off from the coal mine once again—a situation that continues cyclically, as the troubled mine seems to periodically begin operations, only to close again after several months.<sup>3</sup>

The trouble facing the Donkin Mine, however, is the last gasp of a once robust coal industry on the island that employed tens of thousands of Cape Bretoners from the mid-nineteenth century onward. The community had faced the prospect of closure before; indeed, in 1967 when the private firm Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation (DOSCO) announced its planned shutdown of the mines, the federal government stepped in with the establishment of the Cape Breton Development Corporation (DEVCO) to take over DOSCO's coal holdings. Likewise, when DEVCO drew to a close in the year

2001, thousands of Cape Breton miners found themselves on layoff notice. The Donkin interlude, with its handful of working miners, surface employees, American engineers, and Cline Group executives, began when the site was acquired in 2005 by Xstrata Coal, who readied the mine for operations before sale to Kameron in December 2014.

If there is one thing that a comparison of the two closure announcements reveals—DEVCO in 2000 and the Donkin Mine in 2020—it is the veracity of historian Jackie Clarke’s argument that workers’ voices are made invisible by the vicissitudes of deindustrialization.<sup>4</sup> In 2000, the closure of the DEVCO collieries was met with anger among miners and protests among union leaders that the company was unable to facilitate a private sale. The *Globe and Mail* still featured first-hand accounts from Cape Bretoners, such as that of Richard Atwood, who told the gathered Canadian media, “I feel pretty bitter. Mining’s been in my family as long as I can remember, with my grandfather. My father was killed in the mine.”<sup>5</sup> The United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) registered their discontent as its representative Bob Burchill called upon federal politicians to help arrange a sale to a private firm.<sup>6</sup> While media reports of the Donkin closure include some workers’ responses, conspicuously absent are the collective voices of the miners, offered through their union representation. Indeed, Donkin Mine—the last continuously operating colliery in Cape Breton—was not a unionized colliery, a surprising fact on an island with such a strong historical connection to the Canadian labour movement. This inauspicious end comes at the tail end of the “long twentieth century”—shaped by the growth and retraction of economic and cultural reliance on the extraction of coal and the production of steel.

Recent circumstances at Donkin aside, the UMWA has a long history in Cape Breton. In the early twentieth century, the institution was shepherded into the Sydney coal field by famed organizers such as J. B. McLachlan, who believed in the radical organization of workers as a bulwark against the machinations of global capitalism.<sup>7</sup> The labour wars of the 1920s revealed a split between grassroots radicals like McLachlan and the conservative wing of the UMWA, characterized by the governance of President John L. Lewis. National labour legislation in Canada bolstered the position of the miners’ union in the aftermath of World War II, and by the 1950s, legalistic unionism had become firmly entrenched as the dominant mechanism for industrial relations in Canada.<sup>8</sup> While many of the Cape Breton miners maintained their radical outlook, this was increasingly out of step with the position of their



union by the mid-twentieth century. As Michael Earle and Herb Gamberg argue, the bureaucratic institutionalization of the UMWA combined with the attachment to the CCF after 1938 produced a period of moderation and lessened class struggle among the Cape Breton miners.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout the long 1950s and the shocks that preceded the creation of DEVCO and the Sydney Steel Corporation (SYSCO) in 1967, the United Mine Workers was an ever-present institution in the Cape Breton pits. Representatives from the UMWA were featured prominently every 11 June, celebrating Davis Day in the coal communities to commemorate the murder of striking coal miner William Davis in 1925. Cape Breton was a working-class island, and the labour orientation of its miners and steelworkers was well known throughout Canada. How is it that in such a place, the last remaining mine to close would be a nonunion pit with a significant portion of its workforce composed largely of fly-in American miners?<sup>10</sup> In Cape Breton, as in deindustrializing pit towns across North America and Europe, the miners' union and the rank and file struggled to reckon with the scale of the industrial crisis they faced. In this context, many of the old intraunion conflicts that characterized the relationship between District 26 and the UMWA international headquarters in Virginia surfaced once again.

In this chapter, two significant conflicts that erupted in the Sydney coalfield between 1981 and 1984 are examined for what they reveal about the contested nature of unionized miners' responses to the industrial crisis and the contradictions of capitalism facing Cape Breton at the end of the twentieth century. The first section explores a bitter miners' strike that erupted between July and October of 1981—the first in the DEVCO pits since nationalization. This conflict revealed generational and political fault lines within the membership. A slate of young miners, hired during the resurgence of coal during the 1970s, found themselves at odds with earlier generations of miners and their union around issues of pay and contract benefits. Seeking a 60 percent pay increase, the miners struck; though they would ultimately return to work in October short of the amount they sought, the frictions raised during the 1981 strike continued to percolate. In the second section, the consequences of the 1981 strike are traced to 1982–84, when a group of Cape Breton miners embarked upon an effort to break ties with the United Mine Workers and affiliate instead with the Confederation of Canadian Unions (CCU) as the Canadian Mineworkers Union (CMU). This effort ultimately failed, but it reflects the growing inability of Canadian workers and their organizations to

deal with the structural challenges facing their industries. By the 1980s, these challenges would erupt into open conflict.

## The 1981 Strike at DEVCO

The Cape Breton Development Corporation was born of the economic situation facing the island's collieries in the 1960s, a concerted approach to regional industrial development, the will of federal cabinet minister Allan MacEachen and other Liberals to intervene, and the overwhelming financial reliance of thousands of Cape Bretoners on the continued operation of the mines.<sup>11</sup> By the end of the 1950s, the coal industry was in deep trouble; the Rand Commission of 1959–60 had recommended “a slow phasing out of coal as the main source of employment” in Industrial Cape Breton, and the island was positioned to turn toward the tourist economy envisioned by boosters like former premier Angus L. Macdonald.<sup>12</sup> When DOSCO announced its planned withdrawal from coal operations in 1965, the government of Canada moved quickly—tasking J. R. Donald to develop another report on the future of the island's industry. The release of this report in 1966 represented one of the first explicit documents produced by the federal government in response to the looming industrial crisis; rather than prop up the private owners of the Cape Breton collieries, the Donald Report recommended the diversification of the island's economy and the slow winding down of coal operations.<sup>13</sup> The mechanism by which this was to be accomplished was DEVCO—which would boast both a Coal Division and an Industrial Development Division.<sup>14</sup>

For their part, the Cape Breton coal miners expressed a reticence toward some of the underlying ideas of the Donald Report in relation to the operations of the Coal Division. While support for both private subsidy and the eventual nationalization of Cape Breton coal was high, Bill “Bull” Marsh—the president of UMWA District 26 between 1958 and 1980—expressed concern about the idea that the mines would be wound down under the auspices of the federal state.<sup>15</sup> These concerns lessened slightly after nationalization, as DEVCO remained committed to opening new collieries in the area—including the provision of several million dollars to the development of Lingan and Phalen mines near New Waterford and the rehabilitation of existing mines such as the No. 12 in New Waterford and the No. 26 in Glace Bay.<sup>16</sup> Despite these commitments, company financials paint a concerning picture; in 1971, with the firm drawing down on the funding initially provided by the federal

government, new capital injections were necessary while waiting for the Lingan and Phalen projects to take shape. In addition, job losses were mounting as the No. 26 Colliery faced production shortfalls due to engineering troubles. While nearly 7,500 miners worked for the DEVCO Coal Division at the time of nationalization, this had dwindled to 3,696 by the end of 1972.<sup>17</sup>

Darkening the horizons, a deadly fire erupted in the early morning hours at the No. 12 Colliery in New Waterford in March 1973. At 3:15 a.m., a trip jumped the tracks and knocked a support pillar askew, collapsing a section of the roof. Coal dust from this accident then ignited, and miners scrambled to escape the conflagration to the relative safety of the surface. One man, twenty-seven-year-old Earl Leadbeater of New Waterford, lost his life in the fire. Another, forty-seven-year-old mining engineer Donald McFadgen, suffered a fatal seizure while assessing the situation at the mine later that day. The dangers of coal mining, even under the operations of a federal Crown corporation, remained clear in Cape Breton—even for the island's children. Ernie Hennick, a mine technician for the Department of Natural Resources, remembers that day in 1973 as foundational:

Some memories never fade: my first red two-dollar bill at age three; my first tricycle at age five, stolen a week later; my first train set at seven, destroyed by my sister a few hours after I opened it on Christmas Day. One of my most lasting memories also came at age seven: the memory of what it felt like to know that a 27 year old man went to work that day in a mine, but was never coming out.

It was March 3, 1973, and my Dad took me out for a drive to New Waterford. . . . As a seven-year-old, I was simply in awe of [the mine]. Though I had seen it before, it was different that day. I remember the Dominion No. 12 Bankhead that day as a monstrous dark building emitting a haunting hum. The site was intimidating and scary to this tiny boy, and that day was truly dark: it was the day coal miner Earl Leadbeater did not return from the depths.<sup>18</sup>

As a result of this disaster, the company moved quickly. The decision was made to seal the No. 12 Colliery so that the fire could not spread; Leadbeater's body was never recovered from the site.

Financially, the disaster at the No. 12 Colliery proved a significant problem for DEVCO. As a result of problems with production at the No. 26 in Glace Bay, production had been increased at the No. 12 to make up some of the

shortfall. As a result of the sealing of the mine, this was no longer a possibility, and the firm's finances were consequently put under further strain—requiring more than \$3 million in additional funding above the \$29 million previously allocated for the year.<sup>19</sup> Deindustrialization and the slow decline of employment in Cape Breton's collieries, despite the promise of future work at Lingan and Phalen, appeared to be proceeding unabated.

Intervening in this dismal situation was the beginning of the first oil crisis in 1973. "God Bless the Arabs," exclaimed Bull Marsh in a 1980 interview with *Maclean's Magazine*. "I love them!"<sup>20</sup> His exuberance reflected his belief that Cape Breton's coal operations were saved by the hike in oil and gas prices prompted by the October 1973 OPEC oil embargo. This provoked something of a renaissance in the Canadian coal economy, with British Columbia and Alberta collieries boosting production through the decade.<sup>21</sup> Matching Marsh's hope that rumours of the death of coal had been greatly exaggerated, the DEVCO Coal Division moved ahead with several hiring waves, bringing in young miners to fill out the ranks of the workforce; employment at the DEVCO pits actually increased from approximately thirty-five hundred in 1974 to nearly forty-four hundred in 1979.<sup>22</sup>

The shifting demographics in the mines, with the majority of new hires made in the 1970s composed of young men in their twenties, meant that the political equation within the UMWA in Cape Breton was rapidly changing. By 1980, a new generation of coal miners had entered the pits—working, sometimes, alongside their fathers but without any sense of institutional malaise. Indeed, Steve Drake—hired at Lingan Mine in 1977—describes earning more working as a labourer at Wreck Cove in 1976 than he did as a DEVCO coal miner in 1977.<sup>23</sup> The generational turnover combined with the apparent reversal in fortune for the coal industry and the decision by Nova Scotia Power Corporation to transition from energy production through imported oil to the burning of coal led many rank-and-file miners to believe that the 1981 contract negotiations represented an opportunity to push for significant wage gains.<sup>24</sup>

District 26 president Bull Marsh found himself at odds with a rank and file that was increasingly ready to seek significant redress of the issue of low wages. Speaking with *Cape Breton's Magazine* in 1998, Marsh reflected on some of his negotiating tactics while serving the union; to ensure that contacts would pass, he would frequently put forward the contract for a vote at a time when the miners could use the built-up back pay.<sup>25</sup> This would mean frequent contract votes at particular times of year—before Christmas, before miners' vacation

period in August—when the coal miners would be more likely to return a contract acceptance to avail themselves of the lump-sum increase backdated to the end of the previous contract. Such an approach, while engendering labour peace within the coalfield, did not necessarily offer the rank and file the opportunity to press the employer in areas where they felt further gains could be tenable. In 1980, just before the expiration of the contract, Marsh took up a position on the Coal Council of Canada and ended his role with the UMWA. He was replaced by Ray Holland, another member of the executive, to serve the remainder of Marsh's term.<sup>26</sup>

Holland, who had started his underground career in 1953 as a horse driver in the No. 20 colliery before working the long wall at No. 16, took up this position just in time to participate in the next round of contract negotiations. Talks had been ongoing since October of 1980 at the expiration of the previous contract, but the union and DEVCO management were not reaching an agreement on the issue of wage increases. The relative placidity of labour relations in the Cape Breton mines since World War II effectively meant that miners had been indirectly subsidizing the industry by accepting contracts without significant cost-of-living increases. Now with fortunes turned, the coal miners expected a return on these sacrifices. On 7 July, the miners voted down a proposal that would see them achieve a 21 percent pay increase over two years by a vote margin of 1,954 to 827. After news of the contract rejection, miners at Lingan walked off the job—a rank-and-file action that was quickly dismissed as a “misunderstanding” by the UMWA executive who beseeched the miners to return to work.<sup>27</sup> This walkout reveals the divisions that existed between the rank and file and their representation even at this early stage of the dispute.

Over the next ten days, UMWA executives met with DEVCO management and conciliator judge Nathan Green to try and work out a new agreement.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, John “Bunny” Corbett of the Lingan union local and Greg Hicks of the No. 26 local approached Ray Holland to discuss rank-and-file perceptions of the contract talks. Some of the miners, they assured Holland, were deeply unhappy with the first offer; whatever the company put forward would have to represent a significant step forward on the issue of wage rates. Things moved fast. The union executive met again with management on 16 July and reached a tentative agreement that would see approximately \$17 added to the miners' daily rate over two years, but when word of the terms found its way to the mines, the miners at Lingan again walked out in protest.<sup>29</sup> Under the

terms of the previous contract, underground labour commanded a daily rate of \$59.64, machinists and electricians earned \$64.29, and the high daily rate for face miners was \$66.10.<sup>30</sup> Steve Drake describes the situation:

If there's four people in the crowd—and they're yelling, they can rally up forty people pretty quick. And the majority of the guys are just standing there and they're not saying anything because they don't want to get into the fray and get into a, you know, dust-up with all of these other guys and they just go "that's not worth it let's just walk away." So these guys are walking away—these forty or whatever the number might be—they walk out, and once the picket line starts—once the UMWA picket line starts in Cape Breton, it doesn't matter if there's fourteen people, or four hundred people—the miners are never going to cross the picket line. It's just forbidden. They will not do it. So, when that started at Lingan Mine, and I'm pretty certain that the first picket line was at Lingan mine, it spread through the district, and we were on strike.<sup>31</sup>

When the Lingan miners walked out, they were soon joined by workers from other mines throughout the district. Although this was initially unsanctioned by the district executive, Holland put out a statement declaring his support of the legally striking workers until a contract could be negotiated and accepted. With this act, 17 July stands as the first day of a strike that would consume District 26 for the next three months. When the vote officially came in, the miners rejected this contract by an even larger margin than the first—with a final tally of 2,732 against and 303 in favour.<sup>32</sup>

The notions that generational distinctions between young miners and their older colleagues were largely responsible for the events of the 1981 Cape Breton coal strike and that the miners reinvigorated demands around remuneration are not particularly remarkable. Ian Milligan adroitly traces the impact of youth culture and the New Left on the 1960s strike wave elsewhere in Canada, while others have gestured toward the cultural impact of feminism and other social movements on young workers' willingness to ask more of their employers.<sup>33</sup> The same has been argued in the British context; George Gillespie, deputy director of the Scottish area for the National Coal Board, declared in 1978 that industrial discord was caused by young "hotheads" who were much unlike the reasonable older miners.<sup>34</sup> In Cape Breton, however, these actions also emerged during a moment when the tides of deindustrialization

in the coal industry appeared to be rolling back. Yes, young workers were involved—but so, too, did the demands for higher pay respond to material conditions wherein it appeared that circumstances facing the industry had shifted. This context, combined with the executive changes in District 26, positioned Cape Breton's miners to believe that significant wage gains were not only possible but a likely outcome.

The rejection of the second contract meant that the strike called on 17 July when Lingan miners walked out, the first in Cape Breton collieries since 1947, would continue into the miners' vacation period. As a result, further movement between the union and management was slow to develop—though Holland called upon the federal government to intervene in support of the miners. Cape Breton's Liberal members of Parliament David Dingwall and Russell MacLellan pledged support for the striking miners and assured Holland that they would raise the issue with minister of regional economic expansion Pierre De Bané.<sup>35</sup> Gerald Regan, the federal minister of labour, soon appointed two mediators to meet with the union executive and DEVCO president Steve Rankin to find a solution to the work stoppage.

Meanwhile, women in the coal communities began to organize publicly in support of the strike. Julie Anderson and Nancy Thomas organized the United Miners Wives' Association and arranged several meetings to create public awareness of the terms of the strike. "DEVCO beware, the women are here," read one banner of the nearly three-hundred-strong women's march in Glace Bay on Thursday, 13 August.<sup>36</sup> They also sought solidarity across Canada, drawing comparisons between their efforts and those of the wives of striking Inco workers in Sudbury during their 1978 strike.<sup>37</sup> While much of the ire of these women was directed at DEVCO, there were signs that all was not well in the House of Labour. Despite Holland's caution that strikers should keep their focus on DEVCO, there was increasing concern about the state of the district's finances. The international UMWA had expressed that they would be unable to fund strike pay for Cape Breton miners, as a recent American strike had depleted the strike fund. As a result, District 26 sent word to allied unions and members of the public that they were seeking donations; Local 1064 of the United Steelworkers of America in Sydney donated \$1,000 and other local labour groups sent smaller donations.<sup>38</sup> Privately, there were concerns from a financial perspective that the strike could not last indefinitely.

As the warm evenings of Cape Breton summer gave way to the chill of September, it seemed as though there was no end in sight. Another tentative

agreement was presented to the membership at the beginning of the month. This contract encompassed a three-year duration—a sticking point for many miners who preferred shorter contracts—but offered significant concessions on behalf of DEVCO. According to the terms of the tentative agreement, miners would be granted an average increase of \$30.50 on the daily rate over the three years of the contract, supplemented by the addition of an employee dental plan and upgrades to other areas of the contract, such as life insurance.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, this agreement fell short of the 60 percent increase sought by miners, who argued that the extremely high rates of inflation meant that any gains shorter of that target would be gobbled up by cost-of-living increases. As a result, the miners once again voted down the contract—1,972 votes against and 981 in favour.<sup>40</sup> That such a contract would be rejected, the third offering in as many months, reveals the extent to which the miners believed they were bargaining from a position of strength. The idea that the new energy paradigm would end as quickly as it began, taking with it the high hopes of the coal industry and its workers, seemed as alien as that of Cape Breton Island without any basic industry at all.

A flurry of activity throughout September reveals the political visibility of Cape Breton's unionized coal miners in ways that were perhaps inaccessible to workers in other deindustrializing industries. Firstly, as the result of Allan MacEachen's position as the finance minister of Canada, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's cabinet was scheduled to meet in Ingonish on 8 September. Upon arrival at the Sydney airport, ministers and local politicians were met by a picket line of striking miners who demanded action on the strike. After a brief conversation with external affairs minister Mark McGuigan, the miners allowed the politicians to pass through the picket.<sup>41</sup> Further, there was a great deal of politicking behind the scenes by members of District 26. Holland and other members of the executive met several times that month with provincial representatives from John Buchanan's progressive conservative government, hoping to gain a more favourable coal price from Nova Scotia Power. They also travelled to Ottawa to meet with various ministers, including Pierre De Bané.<sup>42</sup> Though it was uncertain what effect these efforts had on the overall negotiation strategy of DEVCO, it was soon after the return of the District 26 delegation that DEVCO president Steve Rankin expressed a willingness to return to the two-year contract format.<sup>43</sup>

Once this concession was outlined, miners voted for the fourth and final time on a tentative agreement on Thursday, 8 October. Lasting two years



from 1 January 1981, this contract offered a retroactive \$11-per-day hike on the daily rate in the first year, followed by an additional \$11 on the daily rate in the second year. In addition, it called for the establishment of a contributory pension plan for DEVCO employees hired after the ratification of the contract. After eighty-three days on the picket line, the coal miners accepted this agreement—ratifying through a vote of 2,306 in favour and 420 against.<sup>44</sup> Despite these significant gains, the fractures they revealed inside the UMW in Cape Breton would not easily heal. While they were not on public display for much of the strike, the lack of support from the international and the moribund strike fund remained significant issues for miners, who increasingly challenged union leadership on this issue. While the strike ended in October, the fundamental issues that it raised would once again throw the miners into disarray just a year later, when an attempted breakaway from the UMWA threatened to tear the district apart.

## **The CMU Comes to Town: Breaking the UMWA in District 26, 1982–84**

On 11 June 1983, the annual Davis Day ceremony was held outside the Savoy Theatre in Glace Bay. The ceremony, held to commemorate striking coal miner William Davis, who was murdered during the 1925 Cape Breton coal strike, had an auspicious guest speaker. Richard Trumka, president of the United Mine Workers of America, spoke loudly to those gathered, extolling the virtues of the labour movement and the benefits of international cooperation.<sup>45</sup> Trumka had only recently won election as the union's president, defeating long-serving Sam Church in a tightly contested race in the fall of 1982.<sup>46</sup> Echoing former UMWA president John L. Lewis, Trumka's approach to running the union was that of "No backwards steps."<sup>47</sup> In this vein, his visit to Cape Breton was no coincidence, nor was it simply to commemorate Davis Day. Rather, Trumka's visit was intended to bolster the union faithful in District 26 against an ongoing decertification attempt pushed by a breakaway group of rank-and-file workers seeking association with the CCU. Indeed, Trumka had made his way to Cape Breton several times since 1982; the UMWA was in the midst of the first significant challenge to its authority in the district since the radical unionist J. B. McLachlan had challenged Lewis during the 1920s.<sup>48</sup>

Despite the successes of the negotiated contract at the end of the 1981 strike, the lack of support from the international union had deeply alienated

a large number of Cape Breton's miners. Nearly immediately, there were rumblings about the possibility of decertifying the UMWA. Foreshadowing the later conflict between the Canadian region and the international United Auto Workers in Ontario, disaffected coal miners applied nationalist rhetoric to underpin their largest concerns.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, dues from District 26 had flowed to Virginia since certification in 1922; the lack of an available strike fund to draw on, for many miners, was seen as a betrayal that would not have happened had they been striking within the United States. In January of 1982, miner Archie Kennedy, speaking on behalf of what he asserted was a significant number of Cape Breton miners, asked John Lang of the CCU for assistance in organizing a decertification campaign. Kennedy had heard of the CCU after watching an episode of the television program *The Fifth Estate* on the unions organizing in Western Canada.<sup>50</sup> In response, the CCU sent two veteran organizers to the island—John St. Amand and Susan Vohanka.<sup>51</sup>

St. Amand officially moved to Cape Breton in the spring of 1982, where he began working with miners in New Waterford, Sydney Mines, and Glace Bay to lead the decertification efforts. He reflects that two significant problems he saw with the UMWA in Cape Breton were the Americanization of the union, having failed to respond adequately to local concerns, and a broader democratic deficit that meant Canadian workers' concerns were not taken as seriously as threatened closures, bargaining concessions, and other issues facing American coal miners.<sup>52</sup> He would later reflect that those months of uncertainty carved deep scars into the community fabric of the coal towns; the decertification effort ended friendships, caused family rifts, and drastically increased social frictions of all types.<sup>53</sup>

For her part, Vohanka viewed the CCU's role in the intraunion conflict as symbolic of a broader Canadian nationalist push that was contemporaneously finding purchase elsewhere within the labour movement. An advocate for rank-and-file unionism, she believed that the CCU and the CMU were vehicles for the return of control into the hands of the coal miners. Further, Vohanka believed that the underlying mission of the CCU was rooted in social movements; the project of rank-and-file organizing, she wrote, was also a feminist project.<sup>54</sup> In this sense, the ability of the miners to shape their own futures democratically within a new union would also empower their families and communities.

The campaign picked up steam in the summer of 1982 when the CMU opened two new organizing offices in Glace Bay, New Waterford, and Sydney

Mines.<sup>55</sup> On 16 and 18 August, interested miners met to adopt the Canadian Mineworkers Union Constitution and elect a slate of officials, with Donald MacLellan elected as president.<sup>56</sup> MacLellan described the appeal of “rank-and-file unionism” in an interview with CJC in 1984; under the UMWA, he believed, the top-down approach was stifling miners’ ability to achieve concessions at the bargaining table.<sup>57</sup> This message was hammered in campaign pamphlets through the fall of 1982. These flyers were distributed to miners throughout the district and contained attacks on the supposed anti-democratic activities of the UMWA and the lack of strike fund and personal attacks on both Holland and Marsh.<sup>58</sup> On 31 December 1982, having registered enough cards, the CMU formally sent an application for certification to the Canadian Labour Relations Board and called for a formal vote to be held in either February or March.<sup>59</sup>

The UMWA responded with its own information campaign. In October of 1982, the international union sent several organizers to Cape Breton to fight the decertification effort. They publicized the past successes of the UMWA, arguing that the union played a pivotal role in the nationalization of the coal-field in the 1960s. This included accounts from loyal UMWA members who sent in personalized stories; one, taken from miner Stelvio Piovesan of Lingan, harkens back to the early years of the union in Cape Breton—describing the exploitation of the “company store” system prior to the coming of the United Mine Workers.<sup>60</sup> Bob Burchell, then the International Teller for the Canadian UMWA, gave the three main arguments against decertification: first, the election of Trumka and the history of District 26 offered an opportunity for growth within the structures of the existing union with a progressive agenda; second, District 26 had a strong record at the bargaining table on wages, benefits, and health and safety; and third, he rejected the nationalist language and tone of both the CCU and the CMU and argued that international labour unity was more necessary than ever.<sup>61</sup>

The vote took place on 9 March 1983. Miners at Lingan were the first to cast ballots, and although members of the UMWA executive spoke with the *Cape Breton Post* expressing confidence, the results were very close. In the end, the CMU failed to overturn the UMWA. With a 97 percent turnout, the UMWA fended off the attempted decertification with a final tally of 1,750 (UMWA) to 1,393 (CMU). A jubilant Ray Holland spoke to gathered miners, expressing a desire to return unity to the Cape Breton labour movement and move on from the hurt feelings wrought by both the strike and the decertification vote.<sup>62</sup> The

intraunion conflict in Cape Breton, however, was far from over. The UMWA had come just 357 votes from being thrown out of the Cape Breton coal field, and Trumka wanted answers. Likewise, the CMU felt that the close result meant that a future attempt at certification was not off the table. Indeed, campaigning never really ended and on 18 August; representatives from the CMU announced intentions to hold another certification vote in 1984.

Just six days after Trumka gave his rallying speech on Davis Day in June of 1983, the international UMWA announced an official inquiry into the causes of the disturbances in the Cape Breton coalfield. Clearly, the result of the vote had given union representatives pause; it appears that they did not expect the closeness of the result. The report, authored by two members of the International Executive Board (IEB) and an international staff member, found three serious problems with the operations of District 26: financial malpractice, the failure to assure the performance of collective bargaining agreements, and the denial of democratic procedures to the membership.<sup>63</sup> The report made no mention of the lack of a strike fund during the 1981 strike or the economic nationalist arguments raised by the CMU and their supporters during the certification drive. However, the report did issue a significant recommendation—that the entire executive of District 26, including President Ray Holland, be removed from their positions immediately and placed under the control of an administrator to oversee new elections.<sup>64</sup> In October, Trumka announced that Bill Evasuk, District 26 IEB member, and Dave Michel, District 5 IEB member, would coadminister District 26 pending executive elections.<sup>65</sup> Of course, this did not go unremarked upon in Cape Breton, where many miners still recalled the expulsion of labour leader J. B. McLachlan from the UMWA by John L. Lewis in 1923.

This decision threw the on-the-ground UMWA supporters into disarray. With the international union in control of the district, an ongoing three-way race for District 26 president, and a renewed CMU campaign leading into the winter of 1983–84, the results of a second certification campaign were far from clear. Complicating matters further was a week-long wildcat strike that erupted between 30 September and 7 October 1983; the cause of the walkout was the layoff of fifteen wash plant employees. Once these workers walked off the job, the entire district refused to cross the impromptu picket—effectively shutting down mining for the week.<sup>66</sup> In response to both his ousting from the District 26 presidency and the events of the wildcat strike, Ray Holland announced in mid-November that he would be supporting the ongoing

CMU organizing effort and signing a CMU card in protest of the actions of the UMWA.<sup>67</sup>

The chaotic nature of these events had organizers of the CMU feeling hopeful about the results of their second card drive. When the union submitted their second application to the Canadian Labour Relations Board, this time on 31 December 1983, Donald MacLellan told reporters from the *Cape Breton Post* that they fully expected a different result—they had been running ahead of their previous registrations all year, he asserted, and according to their figures, they expected a victory.

The District 26 election in January exposed many of the fault lines created by this situation. Supporters of the UMWA accused CMU organizers of working to undermine the election by throwing their support behind particular candidates who they hoped would be ineffectual. The CMU denied these allegations, with MacLellan again remarking that miners were free to vote for whoever they so chose—noting that the true fight for democracy would occur with the CMU certification vote.<sup>68</sup> When the results of the vote were tallied, John Jake Campbell—a former president of the No. 26 local—emerged as president of District 26 along with a full slate of new executive officers.<sup>69</sup> This undercut some of the campaign arguments of the CMU, which criticized the UMWA for the situation of direct administrative control and appeared to settle some of the ongoing tensions within the district.

In the week leading up to the 7 March 1984 certification vote, the UMWA in Cape Breton put on a full-court press to entice members to remain with the fold. On Monday, 5 March, the union paid for a full-page advertisement in the *Cape Breton Post* depicting letters of support from nine allied labour organizations, including the United Steelworkers of America, the Canadian Labour Congress, the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, and the Cape Breton District Labour Council, among others.<sup>70</sup> Trumka, too, took the time to discuss the vote; the changes made in the district as the result of the UMWA inquiry, he insisted, were widely popular and ensured that they would win “a convincing victory.”<sup>71</sup> Indeed, he was proven right. On 7 March 1984, Cape Breton coal miners once again voted to reaffirm the hold of the UMWA over the Sydney coal field—defeating the attempted breakaway through a vote of 1,795 (UMWA) to 1,242 (CMU) in a larger margin than the 1983 attempt.<sup>72</sup> With that, the United Mine Workers of America would remain the only union representing Cape Breton’s coal miners until the final closure of the DEVCO collieries in 2001.

## Conclusion

The early 1980s in the Sydney coal field and the events described in this chapter reveal the contradictions of life and work as a collier on the island at the end of the twentieth century. Contextually, the 1970s energy crisis produced a historical moment where—despite the planned deindustrialization of the island’s coal industry dating back to the 1966 Donald Report—it appeared that a reindustrialization of the industry might be possible. New hires being made at DEVCO, young men being enticed into work in the pits, and Nova Scotia energy production transferring from oil to coal power produced a situation where it seemed that big gains in contract bargaining were possible for the miners. As a result, they rejected three negotiated contracts during the course of the eighty-nine-day strike, ultimately settling on a two-year contract with an approximately 50 percent increase over the course of the contract. Despite these promising tailwinds, DEVCO’s financials and the overall economic situation of the coal industry in Canada signalled a gloomy future. Far from representing a new normal and the rebirth of King Coal, the energy crisis of the 1970s gave way to the oil glut—wherein the price of crude oil dropped significantly each year between 1980 and 1986. DEVCO annual financial reports illustrated this trend, describing by 1983 delays in the transition from oil to coal power in the province and profits falling short of predictions made just a few short years earlier.<sup>73</sup> For those young men hired in the 1970s, the strike represented less the dawning of a new age and more a temporary bulwark against the slow unwinding of the coal industry.

For its part, the attempted CMU raid on UMWA District 26 exposes the weakness of the labour movement in responding to these structural challenges. While the 1981 strike in Cape Breton was undertaken from an assumed position of strength, the UMWA as an entire institution was fighting a rear-guard battle against the dual challenges of technological job losses and a transitioning energy regime. When the institution that had represented Cape Breton’s miners since the labour wars of the 1920s proved unable—or unwilling—to provide strike support in 1981, it provoked a great sense of cognitive dissonance. How was it that such a powerful organization, with its long and storied history, could not help the miners? Nationalization provided a pat answer; the Americans, “the foreigners,” didn’t care about Canadian unions and never had. Of course, as Steven High has noted elsewhere, this notion emboldened Canadian workers in other parts of the country and provided

them with the necessary tactics to challenge their employers over threatened closure. But had the vote gone differently in Cape Breton, would the history that unfolded have also gone differently? Probably not. The divisions that arose within District 26 during the early 1980s reflected material conditions across the entirety of the North American coal industry that had deteriorated to the point where the old, once strong institutions could no longer hold. Such developments varied by industry along with the material circumstances that gave rise to them. Tracing those connections helps understand not only Cape Breton but the entire industrial capitalist order at the end of what the editors of this collection have referred to as “the long twentieth century.”

## Notes

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2. Montgomery-Dupe, “Donkin Mine Suffers Another Rockfall.”
3. The company hesitates to call the decision “permanent,” though they do indicate that the current closure is also not temporary. For the time being, coal is not being extracted in Cape Breton. See “Donkin Debate Continues,” *Cape Breton Spectator*, 3 April 2020, <https://capebretonspectator.com/2020/04/03/brisco-vs-drake-on-donkin/>.
4. Clarke, “Closing Moulinex,” 443–58; for Scottish examples, see Clark and Gibbs, “Voices of Social Dislocation,” 39–59.
5. “Cape Breton Mine to Close,” *Globe and Mail*, 17 May 2001.
6. “Cape Breton Mine to Close.”
7. Frank, *J. B. McLachlan*.
8. Heron, *Canadian Labour Movement*.
9. Earle and Gamberg, “United Mine Workers,” 26.
10. Ayers, “Donkin Mine Punished for Violations.”
11. Approximately seven thousand direct jobs were linked to the DOSCO pits in 1965, with an estimated several thousand more tangentially related in secondary production, service, etc.
12. Parnaby, “Roots, Region, and Resistance,” 8.
13. Donald, *Cape Breton Coal Problem*.
14. DEVCO, *Annual Report, 1967*, Beaton Institute Archives (BI), Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS.
15. “Coal Hangs by a Thread,” *Chronicle Herald*, 22 January 1965.

16. DEVCO, *Annual Report, 1970*, BI, Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS.
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18. Hennick, "Remembering When a Man Was Lost Underground."
19. DEVCO, *Annual Report, 1973*.
20. Anderson, "Reprieve for Cape Breton."
21. Watson, "Coal in Canada," 239.
22. DEVCO, *Annual Report, 1974*; DEVCO, *Annual Report, 1978*; DEVCO, *Annual Report, 1979*.
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26. "Cape Breton Labour Leader Fought for Miners," *Cape Breton Post*, 25 March 2015.
27. "Miners Turn Down Proposed Contract," *Cape Breton Post*, 8 July 1981; "Officials Blame 'Misunderstanding,'" *Cape Breton Post*, 9 July 1981.
28. Manley, "1981 Coal Strike," 47.
29. "Contract Vote Thursday, Miners Walk Out in Protest Move," *Cape Breton Post*, 18 July 1981; "Mining Operations at Standstill," *Cape Breton Post*, 20 July 1981.
30. United Mine Workers of America, "Agreement between the Cape Breton Development Corporation Coal Division and District No. 26, 1979–1980," MG 19.23, Canadian Mineworkers Union, BI, Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS.
31. Drake, interview with author, 29 July 2019.
32. "Coal Miners Reject Contract," *Cape Breton Post*, 24 July 1981.
33. Milligan, *Rebel Youth*; Godden, "Contesting Big Brother," 71–98.
34. Perchard and Phillips, "Transgressing the Moral Economy," 396.
35. "Mining Operations at Standstill."
36. "United Miners Wives Association Organized," *Cape Breton Post*, 15 August 1981.
37. "United Miners Wives Association Organized."
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41. "Striking Miners Greet Ministers," *Cape Breton Post*, 9 September 1981.
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44. "Miners Say Yes, Contract Approved," *Cape Breton Post*, 9 October 1981.
45. "Davis Day in Glace Bay," *Cape Breton Post*, 13 June 1983.
46. Warren, "Watch Out for Rich Trumka"; "Trumka Is Sworn in as President of Mine Workers," *New York Times*, 23 December 1982.
47. "Trumka, Richard L.," in Arenesen, *Encyclopedia of American Labor*, 1389.
48. Frank and Manley, "Sad March to the Right," 115–34.
49. High, "I'll Wrap the F\*\*\* Canadian Flag around Me," 111, 224.
50. MacKinnon, "Cape Breton Coal Unrest."
51. MacKinnon.
52. Moore and Sacouman, "Policy Issues in the Trade Union Movement," 170.
53. McCrorie, *Guy in the Green Truck*, 57.
54. Vohanka, "Getting Organized . . . in the CCU," 143.
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## 10 The Great Spawn

### Aquaculture and Development on the Bras d'Or Lake

*Will Langford*

Throughout the long twentieth century, mining, milling, fishing, farming, and harvesting the woods were essential to livelihoods in Cape Breton. Yet the island's rural and urban economies were precarious from the 1920s. People made do, often choosing to migrate or to defend their standard of living, as best as they could, through union, cooperative, or Mi'kmaw solidarities. From the early 1960s, efforts to shore up the island's social relations and diversify its economic bases were given new strength by the government. Development programs involved people in efforts to better their circumstances. Hope, as historian Tina Loo has framed it, became a state project.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter explores the early history of aquaculture on Bras d'Or Lake in Cape Breton, situating the alternative fishery within the context of development. Mi'kmaw fishers initiated oyster farming in Eskasoni in 1969. The practice spread as a way to create jobs and increase incomes in rural places along the lake. Mi'kmaw and non-Indigenous fishers were involved, though the delivery of development assistance largely emphasized a settler colonial distinction between the two groups. Still, until the early 1980s, oyster farming seemed like a promising way to address unemployment, poverty, and dispossession.

The St. Francis Xavier University Extension Department, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND), and the Cape Breton Development Corporation (DEVCO) provided funding and support, while

fisheries scientists contributed expertise. In the process, oyster farming was informed by two development practices: community development, which tried to address local poverty by building peoples' capacity to carry out self-directed socio-economic change, and regional development, which promised to rectify inequality by increasing economic activity and employment in have-not areas. I wrap my account of Bras d'Or aquaculture in an analysis of these development practices, their sponsors, and their constituents.

Development contains the idea that intentional action can improve the lives of human beings by reshaping unfolding economic, social, and cultural processes.<sup>2</sup> Given its multiplicity, development is best understood according to what it sought to accomplish. Development is an important theme of postwar Cape Breton history, even if studies of development agencies on the island are mostly hidden away in unpublished theses.<sup>3</sup> Where much of this scholarship focuses on policymaking, my interest is more in the practice and colloquial politics of development programs. Focusing on aquaculture also provides a bridge between the too-often-distinct Mi'kmaq and settler dimensions of the island's historiography. On the one hand, historians have self-consciously noted the absences or marginal presences of Mi'kmaq in their studies, thereby emphasizing the exclusion of Mi'kmaq from the industrial economy, from working-class culture, and from popular memory and the heritage narratives informing tourism.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, separate historical work directly assesses Mi'kmaq political resistance and the detrimental effects of colonial administration.<sup>5</sup> Yet attention to the history of development allows for analysis of some considerable intersections and tensions in the experiences of Mi'kmaq and non-Indigenous Cape Bretoners.

Bras d'Or aquaculture emerged from a convergence of three island crises—pronounced on-reserve poverty, falling rural incomes, and the uncertain future of the coal and steel industries—and the development initiatives seeking to provide responses. Mi'kmaq and settler fishers, fisheries experts, university professors, development workers, and government officials were determined to make oyster farming feasible. The collaboration was difficult, and it was shaped by conflicting interests, environmental limitations, and market constraints. The economic impact of aquaculture was slight, but it was in dreams of a “great spawn” that the ultimately unrealized promise of development was most clear. Development signified more than getting by; it held out the democratic promise of greater economic independence within capitalist society.

Aquaculture involves applying agriculture practices to produce finfish, shellfish, or plants in the aquatic environment. Though small-scale marine farming has a long history in human societies, the emergence of a large industry dominated by big business is a recent process.<sup>6</sup> In Canada, state-assisted marine science was linked to the promotion and management of commercial fisheries from the 1890s. Encouraged by fisheries experts, the Prince Edward Island government enclosed Gulf of St. Lawrence oyster grounds in 1912 and promoted private oyster cultivation, only for Malpeque disease to ruin the scheme.<sup>7</sup> Beyond the use of fish hatcheries, aquaculture remained mostly an academic pursuit until a 1978 breakthrough, when researchers at the St. Andrew's Biological Station demonstrated how Atlantic salmon could be cultivated in steel cages suspended in the Bay of Fundy. From the 1980s, salmon farming was commercially viable. An expanded industry producing diverse species has since taken shape, albeit not without controversy. To be sure, supporters consider aquaculture an efficient alternative to the sometimes tenuous inshore and offshore fisheries.<sup>8</sup> Latter-day trends in aquaculture, though, were preceded by the kind of start-up marine farming undertaken in Cape Breton.

Bras d'Or Lake is a large estuary at the centre of Cape Breton, fed by six rivers and two saltwater channels. Mi'kmaq named the body Pitu'paq ("to which all things flow") and recognized that the lake served as a spawning ground for diverse fish species. Mi'kmaw fishing practices were informed by the concept of *no'maq* ("all my relations"), which acknowledged the spiritual and worldly interdependence of all things and emphasized taking only what was needed. Though never a staple food, *mn'tmu'k* (oysters) were collected to eat and sell as well as for ceremonial purposes. Mi'kmaw harvesters practised a modest form of aquaculture by moving oysters to deeper, cooler water and waiting for them to mature in "oyster gardens."<sup>9</sup> But as early as the 1930s, with settlers and Mi'kmaq drawing on Bras d'Or fisheries, overharvesting prompted a decline in naturally occurring shellfish.<sup>10</sup> When a group of fishers in Eskasoni first envisioned oyster farming, they were concerned about their poor catches. But the aquaculture proposal was equally a response to the consequences of settler colonialism.

Their lands and resources were encroached upon by arriving settlers in the nineteenth century, by the early twentieth century, Mi'kmaq in Cape Breton faced increased legal restrictions and political disempowerment exerted through the force of the Canadian state and the attendant Indian Act.<sup>11</sup> For example, as Martha Walls shows in chapter 5, Mi'kmaq who lived

near Sydney, where they accessed waged work indirectly produced by the coal and steel industries, were coercively relocated to more distant Membertou in 1926. In political resistance often led during the 1920s to 1940s by Grand Chief Gabriel Sylliboy and Ben Christmas, Mi'kmaq challenged colonial policies, including hunting and fishing regulations, residential schools, and the sale of reserve lands. They viewed eighteenth-century peace and friendship treaties as a source of Mi'kmaq rights.<sup>12</sup>

In Eskasoni, life was profoundly shaped by the consequences of “centralization” policy. Department of Indian Affairs officials advocated the consolidation of reserves to cut costs and increase control over Mi'kmaq activities, supposedly to speed assimilation. Between 1942 and 1949, the policy was carried out through coerced relocation to an enlarged reserve at Eskasoni and another on the mainland, at Shubenacadie.<sup>13</sup> Mi'kmaq protested through letters, petitions, and avoidance. Ben Christmas argued that centralization was “a great instrument to beat the Indians into submission” and that the Mi'kmaq “did not agitate for it, were not even consulted when the scheme was contemplated, and consequently had no choice in the matter.”<sup>14</sup> Threats and promises pressured over one thousand Mi'kmaq (about half the demographic total) to move from twenty-two reserves. Even before the policy was abandoned, its detrimental impact on the quality of life was clear. Social and familial relations were disrupted, more so since a rising number of children were sent to residential schools. Housing and services were inadequate. And the selected reserves were remote, far from waged labour opportunities and hunting and fishing grounds. Outside of some seasonal employment, dependency on social assistance became nearly universal in Eskasoni.<sup>15</sup>

An Eskasoni band council was elected following the formation of five distinct bands in Cape Breton, an administrative reshuffling prompted by the financial rules in the Indian Act of 1951. The council lobbied for better services and housing yet by 1966 questioned “whether education and welfare programs, unless complemented by economic considerations, are capable of providing a positive environment from which allegedly better generations evolve.” Councillors insisted that the root economic sources of poverty be addressed.<sup>16</sup>

The Eskasoni Oyster Farming Association (figure 10.1) was mobilized in this context. This was a development partnership between the federal government and the Mi'kmaq community of Eskasoni. Instigator Fred Young visited Roy Drinnan, a fisheries scientist at an experimental station in Ellerslie, Prince





**Figure 10.1.** Eskasoni Oyster Farming Association, ca. 1970. *Source:* Abbass Studio Ltd. Fonds, Abbass Studios C Series, item no. C-3619.1, Beaton Institute, Cape Breton University, Sydney, Nova Scotia.

Edward Island. They agreed that oyster culture techniques might be adapted to Bras d'Or Lake. At a December 1969 meeting, the association presented its plan to fisheries experts, DIAND officials, and members of the Extension Department at St. Francis Xavier (St. FX) University.<sup>17</sup> Extension workers came to support Bras d'Or aquaculture—however, their relationship to the concept of development and to Mi'kmaq communities arose from a longer history.

The St. FX Extension Department emerged in response to the Depression in eastern Nova Scotia in the 1920s. Professor-priests hoped to shore up the bases of rural life and counteract the appeal of socialism by fostering a Christian economic and social order. From 1930, extension workers roused fishers and farmers through mass meetings and local study groups, urging them to form consumer cooperatives and credit unions. By building their purchasing power, male primary producers might regain their economic independence and dignity within capitalism. Women were marginal to organizing efforts, and Mi'kmaq were excluded entirely. As co-ops multiplied, the Catholic adult education initiative became known as the Antigonish

movement.<sup>18</sup> Yet the activism waned during the 1940s. After the war, many rural Cape Bretoners judged cooperative institutions as businesses just like any others and withdrew their small capital.<sup>19</sup>

Postwar economic pressures shaped a slow-moving rural crisis. Competition grew, commodity prices fell, and margins eroded. By the early 1950s, small farmers and fishers simply could not produce and market enough to secure a decent standard of living. Some responded by finding other sources of income or investing in new equipment, land, and livestock. Others moved away, helping accelerate rural decline by abandoning farms and fishing villages.<sup>20</sup> In chapter 7, Ken Donovan illustrates some of these rural difficulties in Ingonish. Somewhat belatedly, St. FX Extension Department director John Chisholm proposed a new program of rural development in 1955. In advice that had become commonplace, Chisholm suggested that primary producers should not only increase their output and keep up with marketing trends but also diversify their production. Under the auspices of Eastern Cooperative Services (ECS), new processing and cold storage facilities were created in Sydney. But the investment was done without grassroots involvement and coincided with a late 1950s recession. Soon near bankruptcy, ECS leaders abandoned their attempt to revitalize rural life and instead sought to keep the wholesale cooperative solvent.<sup>21</sup> Rural extension work in Cape Breton had stalled out.

The Antigonish movement retained some dynamism, however, if in a new field. Laudatory press reports brought the movement to international attention in the mid-1930s. And in the late 1940s and early 1950s, hundreds of North American missionaries and visitors from the Global South arrived to take Extension Department courses. These people subsequently set out to apply the principles of community participation, local leadership, and economic self-determination. Antigonish movement offshoots emerged in parts of Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa.<sup>22</sup> In 1959, the Coady Institute was created at St. FX to meet the international demand for training.

Discernibly, the concept of community development crept into the department's work in the course of its international engagement. Communitarian responses to rural poverty were prominent in the postwar decades, though often in ways linked to imperial rule. Attempts to promote local economic improvement took place within much deeper social relations of domination. The very term *community development* was coined at a conference of British colonial administrators in 1948. Arising out of mass education practices

in interwar Africa, community development's pedagogy insisted that once people learned about their common problems and identified their "felt needs," they would use small-scale organization and democratic decision-making to carry out cooperative solutions. Practitioners imagined community as a site to build the capacities of individuals and as a bulwark of social and cultural cohesion. In 1955, the United Nations endorsed the practice.<sup>23</sup>

By then, support for rural self-activity had spread in the Global South. In Puerto Rico, Antigonish movement priest Joseph A. Macdonald trained agricultural extension workers each summer from 1945 to 1963. In 1951, the Puerto Rican government enhanced extension activities with a "community education program" ultimately aimed at redirecting rural people away from communism, agitation against land owners, and opposition to American imperialism.<sup>24</sup> Elsewhere in Latin America, Antigonish movement-inspired cooperatives were tolerated where they did not challenge dictatorial rule.<sup>25</sup> As the United States ramped up its anti-communist intervention in Latin America in the early 1960s, St. FX staff continued to train some of the community developers involved. Offering a Cold War perspective on this internationalism, one brochure proclaimed that the Coady Institute had "blunted the thrust of Communist subversion and shored up the ramparts of free enterprise democracy."<sup>26</sup>

Given community development's origins in empire, it is unsurprising that extension staff first applied it with Mi'kmaq in Cape Breton, through the Mi'kmaq Community Development Program (MCDP). St. FX figures were far from alone in this. As anticolonial movements prompted the rediscovery of Indigenous poverty in Canada, reformers suggested that community development would allow Indigenous peoples to achieve a self-directed adaptation to settler society—as opposed to the imposed assimilation of past racist policies. However, since community developers presumed that Indigenous peoples needed help to help themselves, the practice could be as much neoimperial as democratizing.<sup>27</sup>

Initially prompted by a Membertou band council request for assistance in studying reserve conditions, MCDP ran from 1958 to 1970.<sup>28</sup> White fieldworkers reproduced the Antigonish movement's gendered assumptions that women should focus on better homemaking and men should consider economic matters.<sup>29</sup> As historian Martha Walls has analyzed, Mi'kmaw women faced the added paternalism of social work-style home visits from white fieldworkers, who laced their reports with racialized judgments on the alleged character of

Mi'kmaw mothers. Nevertheless, Mi'kmaw women co-opted MCDP resources to organize and take a larger role in community activity. MCDP also came to partly intersect with Mi'kmaw political networks, as Sister Kateri, Noel Doucette, Joe B. Marshall, and Roy Gould, who worked to revive *Micmac News* in 1965, were among the activists eventually hired as fieldworkers.<sup>30</sup> The push for local economic improvement became well established in the 1960s.

The idea of development also appealed to the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development staff. From 1964, MCDP was subcontracted within the DIAND's own community development program. Proponent Walter Rudnicki believed that community development had a subversive edge and would empower Indigenous peoples to seek change; other DIAND officials thought self-help would reduce welfare costs and shore up consent for the state's colonial structures. As Indigenous peoples seized on community development to challenge Indian Agents and some band councils, DIAND shut the program down by 1968 (though MCDP funding lasted until 1970). However, both political resistance and advocacy by social scientists for reserve-based industry informed further shifts in policy. DIAND introduced economic development funding in the 1970s and devolved many program responsibilities to First Nations.<sup>31</sup>

Insisting that political, economic, and cultural freedom were interdependent, a younger generation of activists sought to invigorate Mi'kmaw politics through new means. In 1968, Cape Breton activists formed Ulnuegg Negonidike ("Indians, we go forward") to defend Indigenous rights and demand a say in the decisions affecting Mi'kmaw lives. The white paper on Indian policy provided further impetus for resistance. Under the guise of nondiscrimination, the federal government proposed to abrogate treaty rights, repeal the Indian Act, settle outstanding land claims, and devolve service provisions to provinces. Mi'kmaw leaders formed the Union of Nova Scotia Indians (UNSI) in 1969 to ensure "one strong voice rather than the weak voices of individual bands," as UNSI president and Potlotek chief Noel Doucette put it.<sup>32</sup> In 1972, activists from several communities also founded the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association, an implicit response to the male dominance of the Union.<sup>33</sup> As historian Sarah Nickle stresses, Indigenous feminists opposed gender discrimination as well as racism and colonialism, and they often called on their political identity as mothers to demand improved community services.<sup>34</sup> For its part, UNSI pursued treaty and land claims research,

and it supported cultural revitalization, offered social services, and favoured reserve-based economic development.<sup>35</sup>

Mi'kmaq emphasized their control over that development. Riffing on an Antigonish movement phrase, Doucette informed the Extension Department, "We now have the leaders among our numbers prepared to be MASTERS OF OUR OWN DESTINY."<sup>36</sup> In 1970, UNSI took over community development programs on reserves and also held an economic development conference.<sup>37</sup> Still, Membertou chief Lawrence Paul warned that overcoming poverty was not enough. Rather, the recognition of treaties "will provide the guideline toward the first steps on the road to equality and will also be a first step towards restoring the Indians' pride and dignity because they involve such things as mineral rights and the reclaiming of lands and a variety of other things which vary from province to province."<sup>38</sup> Political rights and economic gains were mutually reinforcing.

Oyster farming was therefore launched in a context where Mi'kmaq, sharing the vision of Third World nations, saw development as a means of advancing their self-determination. Once two workers were trained in 1970, Eskasoni fishers implemented a Japanese oyster culture technique. Scallop shells were strung along vinyl-coated cables fixed to moveable rafts in Crane Cove, which abutted the reserve (figure 10.2). Oyster spats would attach themselves to the suspended shells, feed on phytoplankton, and mature at a distance from predators (such as starfish) on the lake bottom.<sup>39</sup>

For Eskasoni's twelve hundred residents, the transformation of the cove was a sight to behold. In the pages of *Micmac News*, Rita Joe captured the mood in her poem "Oyster Farming." In the middle two stanzas, she wrote,

With expectations  
We wait.  
There by the Sea  
The blue of Bras d'Or  
Scallops hanging  
On pontoons of spruce  
We wait.  
For the great spawn.

There is a hill  
A watching place



**Figure 10.2.** Oyster farming, possibly using a Japanese technique, at the Crane Cove Oyster farm on the Eskasoni reserve, ca. 1980. *Source:* Item no. 94-653-25167, Beaton Institute, Cape Breton University, Sydney, Nova Scotia.



Where we see our labours  
There on Bras d'Or  
At long last  
An industry  
On suspended shells  
Farming the sea.<sup>40</sup>

The sense of emancipatory possibility was palpable.

Eskasoni fishers and Mi'kmaw political leaders saw little alternative but to pursue a kind of dependent development. With 96 percent unemployment among Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia, Mi'kmaq did not have access to the capital needed for oyster farming or similar ventures.<sup>41</sup> Mi'kmaw developers came to the same strategy as Indigenous reformers elsewhere in Canada during these years: they needed government support if they were going to counter poverty and press for inclusion in the presumed socio-economic benefits of capitalist society.<sup>42</sup>

Government funding arrived gradually. Through sustained lobbying for assistance, Eskasoni fishers persuaded DIAND authorities that aquaculture could be a significant job-producing industry.<sup>43</sup> In 1971, the Crane Cove Oyster Farm—a DIAND-funded cooperative, owned in trust by the band council—was formed at Eskasoni. In other Mi'kmaw communities, federal employment programs provided money and organizational support. In 1972, Micmac Fisheries Development Cooperative (MFDC) was formed with the assistance of the Local Employment Assistance Program (LEAP), a work experience initiative targeting “chronically unemployed” and “disadvantaged” workers.<sup>44</sup> MFDC was an umbrella organization for oyster farming co-ops established in Eskasoni, Wagmatcook, Potlotek, and Whycocomagh (We'koqmaq). Job-creation grants from the Local Improvement Program (LIP) allowed for the start of oyster farming in We'koqmaq and Potlotek.<sup>45</sup> Eventually, in 1974, DIAND and the Department of Regional Economic Expansion announced a funding package to sustain MFDC operations.<sup>46</sup> Eskasoni fishers also met several times with DEVCO officials. And in an unexpected progression from its roots in another island poverty problem, DEVCO soon became the development agency most deeply involved in aquaculture on Bras d'Or Lake.

The Cape Breton Development Corporation (DEVCO) was a federal Crown corporation created during a crescendoing coal and steel crisis. Miners

and steelworkers had high hopes for reconstruction after World War II, as David Frank explains in chapter 6. Yet Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation (DOSCO) responded to competitive and transportation challenges, as well as coal quality and steel-making limitations, with a strategy of planned obsolescence.<sup>47</sup> Mine closures and layoffs began in 1953. Workers demanded that the government nationalize or help modernize the industries, sharply politicizing the future of the industrial economy.<sup>48</sup> The federal government twice sponsored studies of the situation. In 1960, a royal commission report by Justice Ivan Rand argued that government coal subsidies be continued to avert community collapse but steps be taken to diversify the regional economy.<sup>49</sup> In 1966, J. R. Donald agreed that Cape Breton was too dependent on coal, adding that the industry should be phased out.<sup>50</sup> The federal government moved in 1967 to nationalize the mines located in Industrial Cape Breton. The decision was shaped by Allan J. MacEachen, a Liberal cabinet minister, Cape Breton member of Parliament, and St. Francis Xavier University economist who believed that regional economic inequality necessitated a state remedy. DEVCO was tasked with slowly ending coal mining and creating alternative bases of employment on the island.

Development was central to DEVCO's purpose, and it was something that appealed to many who lived in Sydney, North Sydney, Glace Bay, and New Waterford. Less than two weeks after DEVCO took over the coal mines, DOSCO shocked residents by announcing plans to close the steel mill. At a public lecture held in Sydney, Xavier College economist Doris Boyle noted rising expectations around the world: "The old economic fatalism—that nothing could be done about poverty, unemployment, gross inequalities and inequities in income and opportunity—are gone [*sic*]. Citizens want their conditions improved and rapidly and they want to use the power of the state to improve living standards."<sup>51</sup> Indeed, on 19 November 1967, about twenty thousand Cape Bretoners marched in the Parade of Concern to demand government action. When the provincial government established Sydney Steel Corporation (SYSCO) to run the steel mill (a plan that had already been in motion), it seemed to the public that regional solidarity had succeeded. Historian Andrew Parnaby has argued that the popular mobilization against an absentee capitalist foe foregrounded the government's growing interest in countering regional inequalities. Believing that regional development programs offered an alternative to industrial ruination and community attrition,



people invoked the island's history, culture, and landscape to craft a Cape Breton regional identity imbued with moral and political force.<sup>52</sup>

As part of a newly activist welfare state, regional development programs promised to deliver a social right to a decent standard of living no matter where citizens lived. They aimed to do so, in Canada as in new nations in the Global South, by stimulating economic growth and lessening unemployment in disadvantaged regions.<sup>53</sup> DEVCO's initial practice fit within a consensus that job creation depended on attracting secondary manufacturing. Industrial Estates Limited, a businessmen-run provincial agency created in 1957, used financial incentives to entice firms to locate plants in Nova Scotia.<sup>54</sup> DEVCO's Industrial Development Division replicated the strategy by reaching incentive deals with nine companies new to Cape Breton in 1968 and 1969 as well as aiding six existing operations. But subsidizing off-island capitalists and easing deindustrialization with reindustrialization were not reliable development strategies. With the onset of a recession, most of the firms DEVCO had attracted went bankrupt in 1970 and 1971.

DEVCO's regional development strategy was put into question, something that fit a larger trend. In the early 1970s, disappointment with larger-scale modernization projects prompted a transnational re-evaluation of development thought.<sup>55</sup> For historians and social scientists applying dependency theory and neo-Marxist analyses to explain the underdevelopment of the Maritimes, better incorporating the poor into capitalist processes was unlikely to remedy poverty.<sup>56</sup> For Reverend Greg MacLeod, a professor-priest at Xavier College, the overproduction of manufactured goods meant "it might not be wise for us in Cape Breton to pin too many of our hopes on competing in the 'manufactured good' market." Detecting a postindustrial future, MacLeod favoured social investment in the community and, with allies, went on to foster small-business activity through a community development corporation, New Dawn Enterprises.<sup>57</sup> Among other developers, there was growing support for development rooted in small-scale, intermediate technologies adapted to local people and environments.<sup>58</sup>

In late 1971, new president Tom Kent reworked DEVCO's regional development program. He insisted that diversifying the island economy would not succeed unless the coal and steel industries continued to provide a solid base of employment. Therefore, he overturned DEVCO's plans to end coal mining, instead pursuing targeted modernization measures. In chapter 9, Lachlan MacKinnon considers the labour conflicts and mine disasters that marked the

subsequent history of DEVCO's Coal Division. As for alternative employment, Kent dismissed using capital incentives to attract "footloose" industries. He reasoned that the "only development that is worthwhile is concerned with people, with how people live; especially, with how they earn a living." This thinking led Kent to consider rural and urban places and the problems of underemployment and joblessness. Suggesting that income would increasingly come in the service sector and through specialized production, Kent identified the island with "a slower, gentler style of life," where authentic development would be issued from natural resources, presumed Scottish traditions, and rural roots.<sup>59</sup> These values recalled the romantic Scottish pastness that shaped Nova Scotian tourism promotion since the 1930s and the Gaelic song collecting described by Heather Sparling in chapter 8, and they were also felt within the Cape Breton cultural revival that emerged from grassroots responses to insecurity in the 1960s.<sup>60</sup>

Kent's regional development policy turned toward tourism, fishing, forestry, and farming, as well as associated secondary productions—from spinning wool to building yachts. DEVCO provided loans and subsidies to private businesses, entered public-private partnerships, and started up Crown corporation-owned commercial ventures. DEVCO staff also helped primary producer associations get started by offering financial and technical assistance. In aquaculture, Kent pictured that DEVCO would deliver development assistance to a Bras d'Or Farming Association, itself comprised of oyster farming groups formed in lakeside places like Iona, Boisdale, and Baddeck. Kent initially suggested that Eskasoni fishers could access support as one community among others.<sup>61</sup> But as DEVCO ramped up its support of aquaculture, the corporation omitted reserves. The only relationships DEVCO employees had with Crane Cove operations unfolded informally, through exchanges of technical and practical information.<sup>62</sup>

In fact, an exclusionary settler colonial logic tacitly ran through DEVCO's entire regional development program. A couple of further examples indicate the pattern of projects overlooking Mi'kmaw communities. In the early 1970s, a grassroots handicrafts revival spread on the island. DEVCO created Island Crafts to help producers market their goods, but its operation remained apart from concurrent handicraft production among Mi'kmaq, including at the DIAND-supported Eskasoni Crafts Centre.<sup>63</sup> In the tourism sector, the corporation provided funds to the Micmac Festival in 1972 to repair the hall in Potlotek.<sup>64</sup> But the grant was a token when compared with

DEVCO's extensive investment in accommodations, attractions, and food services across the island. Much of the tourism infrastructure came with a Scottish theme (providing one foundation for the Celtic Colours International Festival, described by Del Muise and Anne-Louise Semple in chapter 11) or recalled a French colonial past rather than a Mi'kmaq present. DEVCO assisted Cape Breton municipalities, entered fields of provincial responsibility, and worked with several federal departments. Yet that collaboration effectively stopped when it came to DIAND jurisdiction over Mi'kmaq communities.

In a more discursive sense, characterizations of the poor were applied differently to Mi'kmaq and settlers yet with underlying similarities. By 1960, as the behavioural analysis of the "culture of poverty" concept was used to update older paternalism toward the poor, it became commonplace for those surveying Cape Breton to argue that the problem had as much to do with psychology as economics. An MCDP report asserted that Mi'kmaq were "living aimless, inefficient and what we may call wasted lives" but might "move forward with a new self-determination" if they organized with outside help.<sup>65</sup> Descriptions of Mi'kmaq were distinguished by racialized tropes, but other islanders received comparable commentary. Ivan Rand insisted Cape Bretoners required a new "outlook and spirit"; J. R. Donald lamented that residents had been psychologically conditioned to expect government coal subsidies; Douglas Fullerton, an economist on DEVCO's board, felt islanders had a "dependence syndrome" and there lacked "people with steam in their boilers—the entrepreneurs who start small enterprises on borrowed money, but who work hard to build the business up—creating jobs and wealth."<sup>66</sup>

More sympathetically, Kent thought long-time economic exploitation by foreign capital had prevented Cape Bretoners from seizing "real opportunities" for entrepreneurialism. That Kent was English born added freight to his narrative: his colloquial nickname, the "laird of Cape Breton," gestured to the history of absentee English capitalist control of the coal and steel industries as well as the migration of Scottish Highlanders displaced by English imperialism.<sup>67</sup> Yet the popular allusion to imperialism ignored settler colonialism. And while Kent enhanced the credibility of DEVCO's regional development staff by hiring prominent Cape Bretoners, Mi'kmaq leaders were not among them. Development practices sought to increase opportunities to earn a living on the island but left settler colonial, racial, and class inequalities as they were.

Bras d'Or oyster farming took shape on multiple fronts. Eskasoni fishers spearheaded operations in Crane Cove. Fledgling efforts were undertaken

under the MFDC umbrella at Wagmatcook, Potlotek, and Whycomagh (We'koqma'q). DEVCO fostered cooperative aquaculture in non-Indigenous communities and aided a few privately held farms.

At the outset, DEVCO was assisted by the St. FX Extension Department, which therefore had a role in both Mi'kmaq and settler aquaculture. In 1972, John Chisholm organized cooperatives for DEVCO's scheme. Farmers, labourers, and small businessmen packed meetings held in homes, community halls, and church basements. Residents along the Bras d'Or had a sense of urgency, and they were expectant about a possible new way to earn income. In all, about three hundred people were involved in forming a dozen community cooperatives. DEVCO officials helped the cooperatives secure the underwater leases needed to begin farming. Robin Stuart, a twenty-three-year-old fisheries biologist, was hired as the liaison person with the co-ops.<sup>68</sup>

DEVCO also created a subsidiary, Cape Breton Marine Farming (CBMF), in 1972. Based in Baddeck, CBMF assisted production and conducted research. Its technicians did a lot of the legwork: they furnished cooperatives with aluminum rafts and supplies, oversaw spat collection, monitored hydrographic conditions, ran a laboratory, and so on.<sup>69</sup> Some labour was contracted out to communities, including the production of shell strings during winter months. Philip Drinnan, a technician (as well as Roy Drinnan's son), recalled a scene in Washabuck, where people were so keen for a little bit of extra income that they packed the community hall "full of wires, stinky shells, women of all ages and tea, busily making the strings."<sup>70</sup>

DEVCO aimed to make aquaculture profitable. The low price of oysters—five to ten cents per choice shellfish—was a considerable constraint. Bras d'Or farming had to compete, in part, with wild oyster collection in Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick, where fishers supplemented their seasonal activity with unemployment insurance payments. The break-even analyses conducted by financial staff and consultants pointed away from small-scale cooperative production. Profitability appeared to require steeply increased cultivation. So CBMF sought to ramp up production to a commercial scale. At the late 1970s peak, there were 1,780 rafts spread among the co-ops at close-to-shore sites. Annual output reached about two million oysters. Yet many oysters did not grow to a marketable size and quality. CBMF workers changed strategies, removing juvenile oysters suspended on shells and letting them mature on the lake bottom.<sup>71</sup>

Efforts to improve production were linked with marketing. DEVCO officials believed that reaching gourmet food markets was necessary to improve margins, since low-quality shellfish could only be sold to processors at cut rates. From its first harvest in 1975, the best oysters were sold to food stores and distributors as far away as Toronto and Halifax. There were hopes tourists would come to eat Bras d'Or oysters rather than imported American ones.<sup>72</sup>

CBMF staff also tried to diversify production. Experiments were undertaken with European flat oysters, Pacific salmon, trout, mussels, clams, and seaweed. Apart from mussels, the efforts relied on introducing new species to the lake. For example, a fish hatchery was installed, and research was conducted on acclimating trout to salt water and winter temperatures. Though a shipment of imported trout was destroyed (unnecessarily, it turned out) because of concern over disease, CBMF's stock grew sufficiently by 1977 that it sold fish to a processor in North Sydney. Yet production eventually fell short of expectations.<sup>73</sup>

For their part, Eskasoni fishers equally tried to build up to a commercial scale. Using locally available materials, they packed Crane Cove with rafts, cables, and boats. Just as Rita Joe's poetry captured, band manager Albert Julian felt that the intensiveness of the operation was essential: it gave local Mi'kmaq a purpose and a reason to dream.<sup>74</sup> The first crop was harvested in November 1973 (figure 10.3). But there were already concerns about the sustainability of the farm. The overstocking of the cove strained the local aquatic environment. Lacking food or covered by silt, oysters did not mature at the expected rate. The farm, too, remained well short of profitability.<sup>75</sup>

The scientific dimensions of aquaculture interested federal, provincial, and university fisheries scientists. Jacques Cousteau, a well-known advocate of marine research, even visited Cape Breton in 1975 to see work overseen by Roy Drinnan. Scientists joined industry practitioners to form the Aquaculture Association of Nova Scotia in 1977.<sup>76</sup>

Professors at Xavier College and its successor institution University College of Cape Breton (UCCB) also became involved. After meeting with oyster farmers in 1972, science faculty created the Bras d'Or Institute to study aquaculture and catalyze development efforts. Chemistry professor Donald F. Arseneau argued that the goal was for faculty to stimulate "research, development, and enquiry relevant to Cape Breton Island." The institute hosted workshops, offered continuing education and technical assistance, and collected studies relevant to the development of the island.<sup>77</sup> It also had an institutional



**Figure 10.3.** Fishers at the Crane Cove Oyster Farm, on the Eskasoni reserve, eat from the very first crop of farmed oysters. *Source: Micmac News* 3, no. 11 (November 1973): 1.

twin. Driven by Greg MacLeod, the Tompkins Institute took its name from the progenitor of the Antigonish movement and encouraged humanities and social science professors to address the social, economic, and philosophical dimensions of development.<sup>78</sup>

Scientific, environmental, and market challenges were not the sum of the issues aquaculture stimulated. Political contestation occurred on questions of democracy, the beneficiaries of development, and the role of expertise. At Crane Cove, a set of conflicts centred on community control and its purpose. Despite strong Mi'kmaw participation, the oyster farm was managed by a St. FX extension worker, Lawrence Day, and its board was chaired by a white store owner, Irving Schwartz. DIAND regularly involved non-Indigenous



people in the management of reserve development projects, justifying the practice with reference to business know-how. Signalling a militant critique, a circular sent around the Eskasoni reserve in the fall of 1971 raised issues about local welfare and a sense of powerlessness. It also demanded, “What about the oyster farm?? Who owns it?? How are the workers hired over there???? How come the chairman is not an Indian on the Board of Directors???” The circular announced a meeting and declared, “POWER TO THE PEOPLE.”<sup>79</sup>

The issue came to a head in 1974 thanks to a labour dispute. Fifteen workers staged a three-day wildcat strike, and their spokesperson, Charlie J. Dennis, presented an ultimatum: either Day is dismissed, or the workers would quit. (Joe B. Marshall, *Micmac News* editor, commented that while Day did fine with the oysters, workers did not like his management style.) Additional demands included better pay and working conditions, the hiring of a Mi'kmaw manager, and greater Mi'kmaw and worker representation on the board. At an emergency meeting, the Eskasoni band council asserted its control over the oyster farm. Day and Schwartz were removed from their roles, and a new board of six Mi'kmaq and one DIAND official was formed.<sup>80</sup>

Greater control over the project did not allay all concerns. When DIAND cut its funding for austerity reasons in 1975, Marshall questioned the “mere token” of development funding, as it was inadequate compensation for the loss of Mi'kmaw lifeways and was an instrument of devolution. In 1967, DIAND introduced a system of program grants to band councils. By 1972, the department had removed all of its personnel from Eskasoni. But while DIAND officials no longer managed Mi'kmaw affairs directly, they retained the financial mechanisms to push their bureaucratic objectives.<sup>81</sup> By municipalizing the band system, Marshall argued that DIAND would relieve itself of the need to address the fundamental issues of Indigenous rights and title. He suggested that if the Crane Cove project succeeded, the band would be left to reinvest the profits in reserve services. If aquaculture failed to turn a profit, as would be the case, DIAND officials could simply discontinue their development funding.<sup>82</sup>

The alliance between fishers and experts could also be uneasy. At a Bras d'Or Institute conference in 1975, the tension was both aired and exemplified. Two hundred delegates attended, but just six were working fishers. Charles MacPhail of the Seal Island Marine Cooperative noted that, whereas the presence of officials and experts was underwritten by their employers, fishers who attended would lose a day's pay and also would have to cover the conference

fee. MDFC manager Peter Bernard believed that while the discussion was constructive, much of it went over the heads of fishers. Moreover, Bernard felt that the conference was being used to advertise DEVCO's work and ignored the fact that Mi'kmaq "fathered the concept of oyster farming." The conference resolved to improve communication between scientists and fishers.<sup>83</sup>

Bernard, a musician and bush pilot from We'koqmaq, went further in his attack on DEVCO in the wake of the production and profitability problems at Crane Cove. In the pages of *Micmac News*, he was aggrieved that, "not satisfied in dealing with small groups of non-Indians," DEVCO had appropriated the Crane Cove project for promotional purposes. But Bernard predicted that any difficulties were bound to be blamed on Mi'kmaq and used as a pretext to make future funding conditional on the stewardship of experts. Bernard felt that DEVCO's own undertakings had led to a utopian belief in oyster farming, the "exorbitant expenditures and subsequent financial failures of oyster associations," and a farming method that, it turned out, "cannot and will not produce the choice oyster forecasted." The upshot was Bernard's belief that other MDFC cooperatives would keep their distance from "mass production and pro-establishment thought." Smaller-scale oyster production would foreground the work of "naturally-made professionals" who knew the environments in which they lived.<sup>84</sup>

At one point, Noel Doucette insisted that Bras d'Or was big enough for everyone; this may have been wishful thinking. There were multiple conflicts over the use of the estuary. Mi'kmaq repeatedly warned that in the absence of treatment systems at three reserves, sewage seeping into the lake endangered oyster farming. Concerns were also voiced over the damage inflicted to the lake bed by fishing trawlers. Producers were equally alarmed when the province agreed to allow insecticide spraying in the major timber lease on the island, something that threatened to lead to chemically contaminated run-off. Oyster farmers joined a successful environmental campaign to block the spraying. DEVCO's own efforts to turn Bras d'Or Lake into a tourist destination for pleasure boating, too, had the potential to disrupt aquaculture. DEVCO installed boat ramps, published a boating guide, and planned a marina. By the late 1970s, the greatest resistance to aquaculture came from urbanites who had relocated to the countryside and were upset that their lake sightlines were marked by buoys, rafts, and lines.<sup>85</sup>

Aquaculture created needed employment, but there were limitations. Oyster farming was not labour intensive, and the pattern of work was seasonal.



In 1972, Crane Cove employed 390 people during the busy season. In 1974, MFDC employed forty people, and DEVCO generated fifty full-time and three hundred seasonal aquaculture jobs. Fisheries biologist Ken MacKay noted that while employment expectations had been high, experience showed that cutting down on labour costs was necessary to be “economical” relative to markets. He concluded that oyster farming was “not going to be a large industry.”<sup>86</sup>

DEVCO designs for a cooperative-based industry were also vexed. The dozen cooperatives ranged in size from about 125 members at Aspy Bay to as few as 4 elsewhere. The co-ops were formed several years before CMBF was really ready to involve local people in production. And since DEVCO provided capital and CMBF most of the labour, perhaps one hundred total cooperative members sustained their involvement. Following a period of attrition, the co-ops were dissolved about ten years after they had been created. Already by 1978, CMBF looked to convey young oysters to individuals rather than cooperatives.<sup>87</sup> Aquaculture could not completely reinvigorate the economies of the reserves and rural communities along the lake, nor could it benefit all residents. Occupational pluralism remained essential to rural livelihoods.

The efforts to build an oyster farming industry on Bras d’Or Lake were considerable in the 1970s. But economic and ecological sustainability were elusive. The limited success should not have been curious given the early consensus that the prospects of aquaculture were uncertain and unknown. Consultants hired by DEVCO in 1972 even warned that oyster culture prototypes in Asia and Europe had been pursued only on a family farm basis.<sup>88</sup> Nonetheless, the hope that commercial aquaculture was possible led to experiments on a significant scale. In time, scientific, environmental, and market limitations or accidents as well as conflicting interests adjusted expectations. The curtailed reality was perhaps less remarkable than the sense of disappointment and anger it generated for Peter Bernard and others. Marine farmers expended years of effort and pursued a collaboration with fisheries scientists as well as community and regional developers without realizing their anticipated designs.

Development invited dismay because it suggested future economic improvement, not immediate socio-economic equality. Far from transforming capitalist social relations and settler colonialism, development initiatives in Cape Breton acted within and often reproduced hierarchies of race, class,

gender, and political power. Oyster farming turned to organizing an alternative fishery and merely reinserting Mi'kmaw and non-Indigenous residents into market processes, ostensibly on improved terms.

However, the aquaculture story does demonstrate a distinctive period of state-supported optimism in Cape Breton. Development programs sought to address urban, rural, and reserve poverty crises: community development, by increasing peoples' capacity to better their local circumstances, and regional development, by generating industry and employment in an underdeveloped area. Developers believed that people had a right to a decent income and an improved ability to shape their own lives. They therefore set out to democratize liberal society with Cape Breton-specific action. Supported by those working for a Crown corporation, a few federal departments, and two public universities, oyster farming involved residents in an industry intended to lessen poverty in places bordering Bras d'Or Lake.

As the global economic stagnation of the 1970s lapsed into a pronounced early 1980s recession, state commitment to the idea of development thinned. Community and regional development were gradually abandoned as a means of addressing poverty and deepening liberal democracy. Development programs lingered, but they involved more deferential forms of business incentives and boosterism. Promoters updated their "culture of poverty" analyses to argue that the dependency of islanders was issued from an ingrained reliance on government programs. They more forcefully restated the idea that what individual Cape Bretoners lacked and what they really needed were entrepreneurship and innovation.<sup>89</sup> Where development turned on "helping people help themselves" in the 1960s and 1970s, the consensus from the mid-1980s stressed incentivizing those with a bit of self-help aptitude to boost economic productivity through small-business endeavour.

In the 1980s, new leadership at DEVCO adopted a fiscally conservative and gradually neoliberal approach. They viewed CBMF as costly to maintain and also an instance of public sector intervention where private business initiative was preferred. In 1984, the corporation began to sell off and privatize its development assets, ending its direct involvement in aquaculture. DEVCO progressively withdrew from development activities entirely, supplanted by the tax incentives and small-business loans of the Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation and the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency from 1987.<sup>90</sup> DEVCO, or one of its succeeding agencies, later destroyed the corporation's files, erasing a dozen years of CBMF aquaculture research.

Mi'kmaw oyster farming withered by 1980. And as repeated cuts undermined reserve social and economic programs, DIAND funding initiatives pushed Mi'kmaq, too, toward small-business promotion. DIAND touted community development corporations—an organizational form disavowing the bureaucratic direction of the welfare state and devolving business promotion to select local directors.<sup>91</sup> From 1986, Ulnooeweg Development Corporation tried to incubate Mi'kmaw entrepreneurialism through business training and loans, though one UNSI critic noted that since most Mi'kmaq received social assistance, they hardly had the equity needed to qualify for a loan. Alternatively, the Eskasoni Economic Development Corporation sought to entice investors into joint business ventures in the community.<sup>92</sup>

Oyster farming on Bras d'Or Lake was kept up by a few private operators, including former CBMF fisheries scientist Robin Stuart. As the price improved, something of revival took place in the 1990s, including in Eskasoni under the leadership of Charlie Dennis. Yet production was disrupted by the Multinucleate Sphere X (MSX) parasite in 2002 and Malpeque disease in 2007.<sup>93</sup> Oyster farming remains a small-scale industry, still commercially and ecologically tenuous, and absent the hopes of the “great spawn” that development had inspired during the 1970s.

## Notes

1. Loo, *Moved by the State*, 7.
2. Cowen and Shenton, *Doctrines of Development*, viii–ix.
3. Published exceptions include Bickerton, *Nova Scotia, Ottawa, and the Politics*; Hodgett, Johnson, and Royle, *Doing Development Differently*. For representative theses, see MacSween, “Values Underlying a Community Development Corporation”; Clark, “Cape Breton Development Corporation”; Jackson, “Regional Economic Development by Crown Corporation”; Shwery-Stanley, “Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation’s Impact.”
4. McKay and Bates, *In the Province of History*, 11, 256; MacKinnon, *Closing SYSCO*, 45, 82–83; Parnaby, “Roots, Region, and Resistance,” 5–7, 20–31; Beaton, *Centennial Cure*, 71.
5. See, for example, Wicken, *Colonization of Mi'kmaw*; and Patterson, “Indian Affairs and the Nova Scotia Centralization Policy.”
6. Young and Matthews, *Aquaculture Controversy in Canada*, 4.
7. MacDonald, “Shell Games,” 192–223.

8. Stephenson, "St Andrews Biological Station," 118, 122, 135, 138; Cook, "Aquaculture Research and Development," 356, 369; Noakes, "Oceans of Opportunity," 45–46.
9. Hipwell, "Taking Charge of the Bras d'Or," 182–83, 255, 262; Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources, *Mn'tmu'k. Mi'kmaq Ecological Knowledge*, 5, 8.
10. Robin Stuart, interview by author, 3 July 2015.
11. Parnaby, "Cultural Economy of Survival," 69–98.
12. Wicken, *Colonization of Mi'kmaw*, 152–53; Walls, "No Need of a Chief for This Band"; Harahan, "Resisting Colonialism in Nova Scotia," 25–44.
13. Patterson, "Indian Affairs and the Nova Scotia Centralization Policy."
14. Quoted in Brennan, "Revisiting the 'Proverbial Tin Cup,'" 140–41.
15. Strouthes, "Change in the Real Property Law," 44.
16. Reid, "1970s," 486; Brennan, "Revisiting the 'Proverbial Tin Cup,'" 5.
17. "Development Program for Oyster Fishery Is Planned," *Cape Breton Post*, 11 December 1969, 3.
18. Dodaro and Pluta, *Big Picture*, esp. 82–158.
19. Dutcher, "Big Business for the People," 167–69.
20. Conrad, "1950s," 115–23.
21. Dutcher, "Big Business for the People," 261–62, 272–73.
22. LeGrand, "Antigonish Movement of Canada and Latin America," 208–15.
23. Immerwahr, *Thinking Small*, 5–7.
24. Goldstein, *Poverty in Common*, 31–34.
25. LeGrand, "Antigonish Movement of Canada and Latin America," 210–16.
26. Quoted in Cameron, *For the People*, 334.
27. Langford, "Jean Lagassé, Community Development," 346–76; Meren, "Commend Me the Yak," 352.
28. Walls, "Mi'kmaw Politicism," 1–17.
29. See Neal, "Mary Arnold (and Mabel Reed)," 58–70.
30. Walls, "Mi'kmaw Women," 73; Coffin, "United They Stood, Divided They Didn't Fall," 55.
31. Shewell, "Bitterness behind Every Smiling Face," 58–84; Frideres, *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada*, 431–32.
32. Coffin, "United They Stood, Divided They Didn't Fall," 43–44, 56 (Doucette quoted on 56); Weaver, *Making Canadian Indian Policy*, 4.
33. "Association Born . . . Helen Martin Elected President," *Micmac News* 2, no. 3 (March 1972): 11.
34. Nickle, "I Am Not a Women's Libber," 299–335.
35. Brennan, "Revisiting the 'Proverbial Tin Cup,'" 178, 192–93.

36. Quoted in Coffin, "United They Stood, Divided They Didn't Fall," 63 (emphasis in original).
37. Coffin, 66; Patterson, "Indian Affairs and the Nova Scotia Centralization Policy," 185.
38. Quoted in Brennan, "Revisiting the 'Proverbial Tin Cup,'" 174–75.
39. Chiasson, "Hope for Our Fisheries," 23; Medcof, *Collecting Spat*.
40. Joe, "Oyster Farming," 15.
41. "Oyster Farm Wants Rights to Crane Cove," *Cape Breton Post*, 27 January 1971, 3.
42. Langford, *Global Politics of Poverty in Canada*, 63–87.
43. "Officials Are Enthusiastic," *Cape Breton Post*, 24 June 1970, 3.
44. Keck, "Making Work," 190.
45. "Whycocomagh Gets L.I.P. Grant for Oysters," *Micmac News* 3, no. 3 (March 1973): 1.
46. "Federal Assistance for Micmac Fisheries," *Micmac News* 4, no. 7 (May 1974): 5.
47. MacKinnon, *Closing SYSCO*, 21–41.
48. Morgan, *Rise Again!*, 131–36.
49. Rand, *Report of Royal Commission on Coal*, 19, 46.
50. Donald, *Cape Breton Coal Problem*, 1, 24.
51. Doris Boyle, "The Economic Development of Cape Breton," 5 November 1967, 3, Bras d'Or Collection, #1697, Cape Breton University Library.
52. Parnaby, "Roots, Region, and Resistance," 5–7, 20–31.
53. See Savoie, *Regional Economic Development*.
54. George, *Life and Times of Industrial Estates Limited*.
55. See Unger, *International Development*, chap. 6.
56. See Brym and Sacouman, *Underdevelopment and Social Movements*; Burrill and McKay, *People, Resources, and Power*; Matthews, *Creation of Regional Dependency*.
57. MacLeod, "There's Scope for New Approach," 5; MacLeod, *New Age Business*, 12–25.
58. Macekura, *Of Limits and Growth*, 137–71.
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60. McKay and Bates, *In the Province*; Donovan, "Reflections on Cape Breton Culture," 1–18.
61. Standing Committee on Regional Development, House of Commons, 28th Parliament, 4th Session, Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence of the Standing Committee on Regional Development no. 4, Tuesday, 25 April

- 1972, 11–12; “Capital and Technical Aid Promised by Kent,” *Cape Breton Post*, 20 December 1971, 3.
62. Phil Drinnan, email to author, 26 August 2015.
63. Huntington, “Handcrafts Group Is Active,” 3.
64. “A Boost for Museums from DEVCO,” *Cape Breton Highlander*, 16 August 1972, 4.
65. Quoted in Walls, “Mi’kmaq Women,” 65. On the “culture of poverty” idea, see O’Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 117–22.
66. Rand, *Report of Royal Commission on Coal*, 47; Donald, *Cape Breton Coal Problem*, 4; “Above All, Cape Bretoners Must Learn to Accept Change,” *Cape Breton Highlander*, 30 October 1968, 1.
67. Bill Doyle, “Cape Breton: A Culture, an Ethic, and a Cowboy Economy,” CBC Sydney Radio, 1977, T-0870, BI, Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS; Morgan, *Rise Again!*, 138.
68. Cape Breton Development Corporation, *Sixth Annual Report, Year Ending 31 December 1972*, 21, Newsletters, BI, Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS; Robin Stuart, interview by author, 3 July 2015; Phil Drinnan, email to author, 27 August 2015.
69. Phil Drinnan, email to author, 26 August 2015; Robin Stuart, interview by author, 3 July 2015; Eric Cameron, “Bras d’Or Lakes May Yield a Rich Harvest,” 5.
70. Phil Drinnan, email to author, 27 August 2015.
71. Phil Drinnan, emails to author, 26–27 August 2015; interview with Robin Stuart, 3 July 2015.
72. Cape Breton Development Corporation, *Ninth Annual Report, Year Ending 31 March 1976*, 27–28, Newsletters, BI, Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS; “Eat Oysters, Love Longer?,” *Micmac News* 3, no. 5, (May 1973): 20.
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74. Phil Drinnan, email to author, 27 August 2015.
75. “Eksasoni Oysters a First for North America,” *Micmac News* 3, no. 11 (November 1973): 1.
76. Interview with Robin Stuart, 3 July 2015.
77. Donald F. Arseneau, “The Bras d’Or Institute and Its Projects,” December 1975, 1, Bras d’Or Collection, #2828, Cape Breton University Library.
78. Interview with Greg MacLeod, 10 June 2016.

79. "Questions and Concerns," *Micmac News* 1, no. 11 (October 1971); 5; Strouthes, "Change in the Real Property Law," 71.
80. "Crane Cove—an All Micmac Project," *Micmac News* 4, no. 9 (September 1974): 1.
81. Strouthes, "Change in the Real Property Law," 206; Frideres, *Aboriginal Peoples*, 222–25; Brennan, "Revisiting the 'Proverbial Tin Cup,'" 179.
82. Joe B. Marshall, editorial, *Micmac News* 5, nos. 11–12 (December 1975): 2.
83. "Registration Fee Keeps Fishermen from Attending Conference on Aquaculture," *Micmac News* 5, no. 7 (July 1975): 17.
84. Peter Bernard, "Indians, Oysters and Devco," *Micmac News* 5, no. 3, (March 1975): 2 (emphasis in original).
85. D. F. MacKay, "The Bras d'Or Is Big Enough for Everybody Says Doucette," *Micmac News* 4, no. 9 (September 1975): 1; "Urge Government to Take Action to Curb Pollution," *Micmac News* 4, no. 6 (June 1974): 1; Cape Breton Development Corporation, *Eighth Annual Report, Year Ending 31 March 1975*, 31, Newsletters, BI, Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS; interview with Robin Stuart, 3 July 2015; Mark Leeming, *In Defence of Home Places*, 66–77.
86. Morningside, CBC Radio, 1977, T-0252, BI, Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS; "Eskasoni Oysters a First for North America," *Micmac News* 3, no. 11 (November 1973): 1; "Urge Government to Take Action," 1; Cape Breton Development Corporation, *Supplement to Seventh Annual Report, Three Months Ending 31 March 1974*, 12, Newsletters, BI, Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS.
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88. Ocean Science Associates and Atlantic Mariculture, "An Evaluation of Environmental Factors in the Bras d'Or Lake and Approaches with Respect to a Potential Oyster Culture Industry," February 1972, 25, Bras d'Or Collection, #3035, Cape Breton University.
89. Higgins, "Entrepreneurship and Economic Development," 128; deRoche, "Culture of Poverty Lives On," 225–54.
90. Bickerton and MacNeil, "Models of Development for Atlantic Canada," 60.
91. MacAulay, "Contradictions in Community Economic Development," 115–36.
92. Clifford Paul, "Corporation Vies for Joint Business Deals," *Micmac News* 16, no. 11 (November 1986): 7; Douglas, "Ulnooweg, Toughest on Poor," 1, 6.
93. Aquaculture Association of Nova Scotia, "Revitalizing the Bras d'Or Lakes," 3.

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## 11 From Artifact to Living Cultures

### Cape Breton's Tourism History and the Emergence of the Celtic Colours International Festival

*Anne-Louise Semple and Del Muisé*

The custom of tourism has a long history; however, the reasons behind this activity, and its very nature and scale, have evolved significantly over time.<sup>1</sup> Evidence of this can be seen in social and economic indicators that contribute to ongoing views of tourism as an important development tool—one that carries as many risks and challenges as opportunities.<sup>2</sup> In 2017 the UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) reported that tourism generated 10 per cent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP). By 2019, global tourism trends included travellers seeking “local” experiences that could lead to personal change, a rise of Instagram users wanting to showcase their adventures, and increased awareness of environmentally sustainable travel.<sup>3</sup>

Such information confirms that tourists have ever-changing goals and signals the fact that tourism strategies can be both market driven<sup>4</sup> as well as place based and community centred.<sup>5</sup> As a result of these influences, tourism trends, practices, and the scholarship examining them have varied their focus from heritage<sup>6</sup> to community-based decision-making,<sup>7</sup> sustainability,<sup>8</sup> and most recently experiential and destination tourism.<sup>9</sup>

With these different approaches in mind, this chapter will focus on the changing tourism history of Cape Breton Island during the long twentieth century and, in particular, its transition from a heritage and natural beauty basis to an experiential style that emphasizes living cultures. To illustrate

the latter and consider some of the implications of such a shift, a brief historical examination of the Celtic Colours International Festival (hereafter Celtic Colours) will occur. This case study is important because part of the festival's mission is "to promote, celebrate and develop Cape Breton's living Celtic culture."<sup>10</sup> Heralded as "a unique celebration of Cape Breton Island's living traditional culture" by Tourism Nova Scotia,<sup>11</sup> it provides considerable evidence of the effects of a broader change in tourism approach—one that could help inform the next phase of the island's tourism efforts.

## Global Trends and Cape Breton's Tourism History

Cape Breton Island makes up about 20 percent of Nova Scotia's land mass but a sharply declining portion of its million or so inhabitants; approximately 135,000 persons lived in Cape Breton in 2015, down from closer to 200,000 only a few decades earlier. This demographic crisis, which is accelerating, informs virtually all discussions of contemporary issues on the island. Most Cape Bretoners (about 70 percent) still live in Cape Breton County, primarily in the former coal and steel towns surrounding Sydney Harbour, incorporated as the Cape Breton Regional Municipality at the turn of the twenty-first century.<sup>12</sup> This fairly urbanized area surrounding Sydney serves a widely dispersed hinterland of largely subsistence farming, fishing, and lumbering communities still made up primarily of Scottish, Acadian, and Irish/Newfoundlander descendants of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century migrants to the island. The out-migration from rural areas is even more acutely felt than in urban places.

For a long time, the rural areas supplied the coal mines and steel mills surrounding Sydney Harbour with workers, thereby creating a symbiotic cultural relationship between the urban core and more dispersed rural communities. While a large number of other migrant workers came to the coal fields and steel mill from Britain, the Caribbean, and continental Europe in the period prior to World War I, most came from rural Cape Breton or Newfoundland. Their dominant culture remained Scottish, Irish, or Acadian; their predominant religion, Roman Catholic. In most towns migrants from the countryside and their descendants made up over 80 percent of all residents. The communal nature of the urban/rural interaction led to cultural transfers, particularly in music and those expressive cultures surrounding storytelling and language retention. Many of these working migrants had retained Gaelic

or French as their first languages—for a generation, at least—and formed close bonds with their fellow kinsmen in the urban milieu. These urban areas remained hotbeds for “Celtic” culture and music<sup>13</sup> throughout the first half of the century, though their culture and language seldom travelled much beyond the island, except to diasporic communities outside the region, where it constituted a bond among migrants.<sup>14</sup>

Large-scale or mass tourism on the island had been somewhat problematic until the mid-twentieth century, as little of the infrastructure necessary for expanding the number of visitors was available. The island was always admired for its natural beauty, focused on for the so-called primitive authenticity of its rural core, and dominated by isolated Scottish and Acadian communities renowned for their tenacity and handiwork. The northern Highlands remained relatively inaccessible and mythic until opened up by investment in roads and lodges in the 1930s.<sup>15</sup> With its wilderness aesthetic as the core product, the Cabot Trail and the Cape Breton Highlands National Park would form part of a regional response to imitate development of similar destinations elsewhere.<sup>16</sup>

Cape Breton’s perceived identity prior to the 1950s tended to be sketched out and defined by either outsiders/visitors or off-island natives with nostalgic recollections of a mostly rural island life.<sup>17</sup> Rural Cape Bretoners were invariably characterized as quaint and/or backward; urban dwellers were seen as fiercely class conscious.<sup>18</sup> Island identity was somewhat confused by the fact that so many Cape Bretoners, as the twentieth century wore on, would find themselves away from the island, forced to migrate mostly for economic opportunity. Their nostalgia for their island communities prompted a certain amount of expatriate return tourism, though to some extent, the trend prior to the 1950s was for cultural products to be distributed among off-island expatriate communities.<sup>19</sup> In diasporic areas of greater Boston and Detroit, for example, likely there were as many occasions to hear Cape Breton musicians, who travelled to play regularly at dances and bars there, than might have been available at the same time in the Sydney area, at least in the period up to the 1950s.

Off the island after World War II, technological advances and economic growth led to a more rapid and coordinated expansion of the tourism industry around the world.<sup>20</sup> Zuelow has suggested that this was driven by both economic and political objectives and that it was all the more pervasive due to travel by the masses as well as the ability to access almost any location around

the globe.<sup>21</sup> While it became easier to visit distant and obscure places, factors such as tourist motivations, market competition, security considerations, and the impact of global events created greater complexity.<sup>22</sup>

In the case of Cape Breton, tourism to supplement failing industries in the Sydney area and as an ultimate replacement for them became a dominant discourse following World War II.<sup>23</sup> Although initiated prior to the war, the strategy that came to symbolize Nova Scotian tourism and especially depictions of Cape Breton was centred on an exaggerated Scottish identity.<sup>24</sup> Angus L. MacDonald, the premier from 1933 to 1954, interrupted by a stint as a cabinet minister in Ottawa during the war, was driven by his own nostalgic beliefs as a native Cape Bretoner, though mostly a Halifax-based lawyer following World War I. In a speech to the Antigonish Highland Society in 1937, MacDonald claimed Nova Scotia and Cape Breton were the “last great stronghold of the Gael in America.”<sup>25</sup> Reflected in mass media campaigns by a newly propelled “promotional state,” the “tartanism” of this period created tourism images that, while failing to capture the cultural and ethnic diversity of Nova Scotia, established a trope that was hard to dislodge.<sup>26</sup> Tourist images of Cape Breton had inevitably focused on the scenic splendour of Cape Breton Highlands National Park, which MacDonald had championed,<sup>27</sup> and paid little attention to the bustling steel and coal towns of the Sydney area.<sup>28</sup>

Automobile tourism provoked dramatic changes throughout the 1950s and 1960s, spurred on by the completion of the Canso Causeway in 1955, the paving of the Cabot Trail, and the development of the Trans-Canada Highway—all of which opened the island to visitors in ways that had been problematic earlier.<sup>29</sup> Despite this, the tourist season was short and the clientele limited mostly to wealthy outsiders pursuing sea air, salmon, or moose. Then the Canadian Centennial in 1967 coincided with an extreme crisis in the coal and steel businesses of the industrial heartland. Studies commissioned to examine the future of those two industries were pessimistic about their futures, most arguing for a repositioning of the island’s economy to feature more tourist development. While some hope was held out, after a brief recovery in the 1970s, most projections trended toward abandonment of the early twentieth-century reliance on coal- or steel-centred industries in favour of a more diversified economy.

Industry-based alternatives to coal and steel proved illusory, and the island descended into a quasi-welfare deindustrializing state while the national economy moved away from the production of goods to the provision of



services. Economic planning for reindustrialization, such as it was, was to be taken over by a succession of federal agencies that pursued development with various degrees of success. This included the establishment of the Cape Breton Development Corporation (DEVCO) in 1967, under which an Industrial Development Division (IDD) was charged with developing service industries such as tourism.<sup>30</sup> The final abandonment of the coal and steel industries would only be completed in the 1990s, and this led to a renewed concentration on mass tourism as an alternative to heavier industries.<sup>31</sup> A successful and sustainable tourist industry demands more than nature and history, however—what was needed was a complex of offerings that could draw large numbers of tourists more than once and keep them on the island for as long as possible.

One response to the economic collapse and subsequent demographic effects on Cape Breton was a new and animated cultural sense of self—one that would entail the exploration of relationships between the declining industrial core and still culturally vibrant rural hinterlands. The cultural performance side of this awakening sense of identity could be somewhat nostalgic in its first iterations, but the timing was opportune, as provincial and federal governments would soon increase their investment in culture significantly.<sup>32</sup> Parallel to this, the notion that modernity—experienced in rural areas most directly with the arrival of electricity, telephones, and televisions after midcentury—had somehow compromised the future of Celtic music and language traditions was countered in the 1970s with a pushback that emphasized the rural origins of the island's musical traditions.<sup>33</sup> Their revival through community concerts and performances by amateurs, especially the inaugural Glendale Concert (1973), which also saw the founding of the Cape Breton Fiddlers Association, would prove central to that rebirth.

It was also in this era that the Nova Scotian government formed a new Department of Tourism (1970)—the mandate of which was to “develop, assist, and promote the industry,” especially for economic and general well-being purposes.<sup>34</sup> Although the emergence of summer concerts dedicated to the fiddling traditions of the island came to the fore independent of this new provincial entity, they would quickly prove valuable to its agenda. The triumvirate of Broad Cove, Big Pond, and Glendale outdoor weekend concerts was eventually supplemented with a wide variety of more local imitators, all providing up-and-coming musicians a chance to perform before live audiences. There would hardly be a summer weekend free of the sounds of fiddlers

somewhere on the island by the 1980s. Complementing this was the tradition of community-based square dances sponsored by local organizations throughout the island, particularly in the Celtic-dominated western fringes of Inverness County.<sup>35</sup> This increasingly public display of “Cape Breton culture” built the foundations necessary for it to later feature as an integral component of the island’s tourism strategy.

With this in mind, evidence indicates that “cultural tourism” featured heavily around the world from the 1980s onward—not just in tourist motivations and planning strategies but also in scholarly examinations of the effects of tourism on culture.<sup>36</sup> Early iterations of this cultural turn involved the conspicuous consumption of heritage by visitors and its increasingly professional management by decision-makers.<sup>37</sup> As showcasing of heritage artifacts and sites became more prevalent, a growing awareness among scholars and tourism managers emerged around the notion that individuals experience heritage in distinct ways and seek it out for different reasons.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, it appears that tourists were progressively motivated to “experience” heritage as a means of exploring, clarifying, and at times reconciling elements of their identity.<sup>39</sup>

This desire for “experience” would come to dominate tourist aspirations and the imagination of those responsible for tourism strategies—something that persists today. At the core of this is the idea that through first-hand experience, memory and meaning are enhanced significantly. Using museums and heritage sites as an example, this trend has led to an emphasis on experiences that are “real,” “natural,” and “authentic” and at the same time involve interactive presentation that enables individuals to have a more personal encounter.<sup>40</sup> Market competition to attract experience seekers has led to strategies that can help tourists “explore what makes a destination distinctive, authentic, and memorable . . . the essence of the destination—its cultural terroir.”<sup>41</sup>

Against this global backdrop, three intersecting cultural trends would lay the groundwork for a further shift in Cape Breton’s tourism history and Celtic Colours as part of that. In the late 1970s, a small theatre group associated with the University College of Cape Breton,<sup>42</sup> which found its first expression in local pubs celebrating the new work of local performers, produced the theatrical *Rise and Follies of Cape Breton Island* and its successor, the *Cape Breton Summertime Revue*. The latter lasted into the 1990s, when it was suspended, only to be revived in 2015 as the *Cape Breton Summertime Revue: The Next Generation*. The revues would be a proving ground for many performers and acts that subsequently achieved national and international status. Each

year always featured at least one fiddler from the island, and productions were usually dominated by skits and music that celebrated the survival of the island's culture, many riffing off an interaction between rural and urban Cape Bretoners while often poking fun at tourists.<sup>43</sup> Members of the Rankin Family and Rita MacNeil, as well as notable fiddlers such as Jerry Holland, Howie MacDonald, and Natalie McMaster, were featured at various times. Thus, key elements of a professionalizing performance culture were present by the 1990s—the point at which the preconditions for more tourism based on Cape Breton culture started to build.<sup>44</sup> These circumstances supported a growing number of highly skilled and in-demand performers as well as the maintenance of event facilities.

A second precondition for Cape Breton's evolving tourism approach was somewhat more remote. New Canadian content broadcast regulations demanded more visibility for Canadian performers. This would eventually lead such Cape Breton performers as John Allan Cameron and Rita MacNeil, not to mention Anne Murray from Springhill, to prominence, hosting national TV shows that regularly featured Cape Breton talent with a celebratory flourish.<sup>45</sup> As they gained notoriety, the promotion of Cape Breton's distinctive performance culture would soon be featured alongside scenic splendour in tourist advertising. Indeed, Rita MacNeil's own TV series (*Rita and Friends*, 1990–94, CTV) was, for a time, cosponsored by the Nova Scotia Tourist Bureau.

Further links between Cape Breton's culture and tourism efforts appeared in the overarching tourist strategy for the island, which was commissioned by DEVCO-IDD and completed in 1985. The report suggested that Cape Breton's "unique culture" should be valued equal to the island's natural beauty, and it foregrounded cultural tourism as a major target for future development, provided that performance spaces, recording studios, and so on were upgraded sufficiently.<sup>46</sup> By 1990 economic development plans for the island included the "Come Home to Cape Breton" campaign, predicated on convincing diasporic Cape Bretoners to reexperience first-hand the culture they might now only be seeing on television.<sup>47</sup> While on tour, the iconic Men of the Deeps choir, consisting of former coal miners, distributed pamphlets encouraging tourism and even remigration advertisements to its audiences in Ontario.<sup>48</sup> This phase of Cape Breton's tourism history, which also saw a growth in relevant government and industry groups (e.g., Nova Scotia Tourism Partnership Council, established in 1997), inspired a desire to "experience" Cape Breton culture, whether visiting for the first time or returning home. It necessitated strong

cultural elements, dramatic improvements to existing community establishments, the construction of a number of new spaces, and the upgrading of sound systems.

A third precondition behind the island's change in tourism strategy was an international Celtic revival that swept the Western world in the 1990s and continues to evolve. The success of major touring shows like *Riverdance* and the *Chieftains*, along with Celtic consciousness expressed through political activism and new commemorative practices, led to a wide variety of festivals celebrating the music and culture of all Celtic peoples worldwide. Suddenly it was "cool to be Celtic,"<sup>49</sup> and soon invitations for many Cape Breton performers to participate came flooding in. All across North America and throughout Britain and Europe, the Cape Breton fiddle style was recognized as an important variant of the musical traditions of Celts everywhere.

It was in this context of expanded horizons that a greater economic potential for experiential tourism focused on culture would eventually materialize. A trip to the Celtic Connections Festival in Glasgow, Scotland, by Joella Foulds and Max MacDonald would see plans for a comparable yet distinctly Cape Breton event emerge in response.<sup>50</sup> The natural beauties of the Cabot Trail remained a powerful draw with an extensive offering of bus tours; however, the possibilities for a fall season, when the leaf colours were changing and the summer visitation had slowed somewhat, presented a real opportunity to expand tourism's "shoulder season." All of these preconditions would ultimately set the stage for Cape Breton's Celtic Colours.

## Tourism, Festivals, and the Case of Celtic Colours

Worldwide, tourism has proven a valuable economic alternative for areas defined as rural and/or isolated where traditional industries such as fishing, agriculture, and mining have declined.<sup>51</sup> In particular, it has been viewed as a sustainable way to diversify a place's economic base in the face of fiscal and demographic crisis.<sup>52</sup> As an extension of this and during the expansion of cultural tourism, festivals started appearing as a focal point for tourists and tourism managers alike in both urban and rural locations.<sup>53</sup>

One possible reason festivals became so prominent was that they were known to help places adapt, rebuild, and be resilient to instability caused by globalization and deindustrialization.<sup>54</sup> They were also thought to provide rural areas with an approach to social regeneration and have been viewed

as necessary for the future of communities where the decline of traditional industries had caused significant out-migration.<sup>55</sup> The fact that festivals are influenced by geography while at the same time contributors to new geographies means that they are a dynamic tool that can evolve over time as industry, consumer choices, and place-based needs take shape.<sup>56</sup>

In contrast, the rapid development of festivals presented potential risks—especially as they can often be introduced strictly as vehicles for commodification rather than cultural celebration, retention, or enhancement.<sup>57</sup> Tourism literature confirms such apprehensions are well founded if festivals are not developed and managed carefully.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, genuine concerns existed in Cape Breton when the concept for Celtic Colours was first raised—namely, that priority was being placed on “tourist dollars” over cultural preservation.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, the island’s socio-economic, cultural, industrial, and tourism history presented a relevant backdrop against which a festival had the potential to be established successfully.

While Celtic Colours was not the first festival on the island, its scope, scale, longevity, and eventual emphasis on living cultures as part of an island-wide tourism strategy make it pertinent to this examination. Founded by Sydney-based entertainment producers Joella Foulds and Max MacDonald of Rave Entertainment Inc. (also coproducers of the *Cape Breton Summertime Revue* until 1994), it evolved out of a desire to address cultural, socio-economic, and professional music needs and opportunities. Focused on culture, it carried aspirations to safeguard Cape Breton’s cultural traditions well into the future, following previous fears that they were under threat.<sup>60</sup> Although this would be appealing to visitors and had the potential to extend the tourist season into the autumn, Celtic Colours emerged independent of formal tourism agendas and strategies. Meanwhile, the global Celtic revivalism that was occurring at the time and the associated achievements of a new generation of young Cape Breton musicians were perhaps auspicious.<sup>61</sup> In recognition of these considerations and the concerted efforts by locals in rural locations to keep Celtic cultural traditions alive, a decentralized format was proposed whereby events would take place in communities around Cape Breton over a nine-day period, beginning with the Canadian Thanksgiving weekend in early October each year.<sup>62</sup>

While festival development, planning, and financing were underway, the Nova Scotian government launched a two-year Celebration of Music program that targeted the local music industry as a profitable way forward for

tourism and business.<sup>63</sup> This came on the back of the highly successful “floating ceilidhs,” which involved provincially funded representatives from tourism, government, and marketing companies touting Cape Breton and Nova Scotian entertainers via chartered ferry down the Eastern Seaboard. This early campaign gave credence to music-based events set among the island’s natural beauty and “friendly people,”<sup>64</sup> while the Celebration of Music initiative gave Celtic Colours a platform for much-needed start-up funding.

Such funding was contingent, however, on an exchange between the government and a not-for-profit society rather than a private enterprise that was the registered status of Rave Entertainment Inc. To enable access to important resources<sup>65</sup> and make the festival possible in the end, a nonprofit, Celtic Colours Festival Society, was formed.<sup>66</sup> Made up of community leaders from across the island, the society was responsible for various policy and finance decisions as well as for maintaining a dialogue between the festival and local communities in which events were being held.<sup>67</sup> Developments such as these were part of the festival, gradually being embraced as a key component of both local and provincial tourism plans and strategies. It is important to acknowledge that this convergence inevitably came with new expectations, requirements, tensions, opportunities, benefits, and complexity in general.

The initial year of the festival far exceeded expectations: more than three hundred artists performed in twenty-six venues spread across eighteen different locations, and nearly twelve thousand tickets were sold—four thousand from off-island. The majority of the smaller community events sold out. The overall economic impact was calculated to be \$3.5 million.<sup>68</sup> The province was quick to acknowledge Celtic Colours as a good example of the Year of Music program at work,<sup>69</sup> the results of which were hailed as a success for the provincial government in the Nova Scotia Legislature at the end of Celtic Colours’ first year.<sup>70</sup> In further complement to this, the Nova Scotia Tourism Partnership Council was founded in 1997 with a view to strategically align the province’s tourism agenda with the global marketplace—one that, as noted earlier, was turning toward forms of experiential tourism.

The notion that the festival celebrated “living cultures”<sup>71</sup> first appeared in select media reports in 1997 and was then formally showcased by its society in the 1998 festival program. The essence of Celtic Colours had always been to bring people together to “experience” culture through concerts, workshops, community events, and other learning opportunities; however, this soon became more explicit in terminology and promotion. As can be confirmed by

cobranded advertising between Celtic Colours and Tourism Cape Breton,<sup>72</sup> the increased emphasis on experiencing living cultures flagged a wider strategic and collaborative transition in the island's overall approach to tourism. This was consistent with global shifts away from artifact-based historical tourism to more personal interaction with places and their cultures. Central to the festival's ability to enable this was the scheduling of events in places thought to allow attendees to experience the "living culture as it exists in rural Cape Breton where the music, dance and Gaelic language have been preserved for over 200 years."<sup>73</sup>

Despite this transition, the original mission statement of the Celtic Colours Festival Society further perpetuated tourism images of the natural beauty of the island while making a commitment to the promotion and maintenance of the Celtic cultures of Cape Breton.<sup>74</sup> Meanwhile, those reporting on the festival wrote of experiencing a thriving, living Cape Breton identity and culture that were being generously shared across generations through official festival venues and informally in the homes of locals.<sup>75</sup> Soon after Celtic Colours' inception, these sentiments would feature in revisions to its mission statement and further cement the intention to inspire experiences for tourists and local residents alike—that is to say, the current goal of the Celtic Colours Festival Society is to "promote, celebrate and develop Cape Breton's living Celtic culture and hospitality by producing an international festival during the fall colours that builds relationships across Cape Breton Island and beyond."<sup>76</sup>

Just five years after Celtic Colours began, Premier John Hamm declared it had "quickly become one of Nova Scotia's biggest attractions."<sup>77</sup> It was felt that this represented an effective tourism strategy whereby the spectacle of the leaves changing colour in the fall was blended with experiencing "Nova Scotia's Masterpiece" first-hand.<sup>78</sup> Rodney MacDonald, a well-regarded and highly connected Cape Breton fiddler who was Nova Scotia's minister of tourism, culture, and heritage in 1999 and subsequently premier in 2006, cited the festival as having a "multiplier effect" for the economy.<sup>79</sup> Continued funding for events such as Celtic Colours was therefore seen as important to the economies, communities, and tourism industries of both Nova Scotia and Cape Breton.<sup>80</sup>

Within a decade, Celtic Colours would be recognized as one of the world's pre-eminent Celtic festivals, attracting performers and audiences from around the world and generating profits for Cape Breton communities when tourism would otherwise have come to a halt. These were noteworthy achievements

in the face of the near economic crisis felt across the island in the lead-up to its introduction. Perhaps unexpectedly, evidence suggests that the explicit adoption of an experience-based form of tourism by Celtic Colours, Tourism Cape Breton, and the province of Nova Scotia has done more than enhance the experiences of visitors; it has also strengthened the cultural identity of Cape Bretoners: “Locally, [the Festival] has contributed to Island pride and self-confidence, in addition to more tangible benefits, and those contributions have been seen to be widely-distributed in a way that is very consistent with Island values about music and dance, hard work, wealth creation and distribution.”<sup>81</sup>

This brief glimpse of Celtic Colours’ history hints that its communication, depiction, promotion, and showcasing of living cultures have led to a series of positive outcomes for Cape Breton—its communities, businesses, residents, economy, tourism industry, and government. By 2019, a myriad of community experiences—breakfasts, suppers, art exhibitions, dance and fiddle lessons, and so on—had evolved to form an integral part of the festival. The 2014 program, for instance, took up most of fifty pages just to list these, including in recent years a series of collaborative scholarly conferences hosted by Cape Breton University in Sydney, usually around a theme on offer that given year. The performances and performers have almost doubled since the early days, and the number of ancillary events increases each year. Its overall economic impact has been profound for Nova Scotia’s tourism industry in general and Cape Breton’s in particular.<sup>82</sup> While the festival has not been solely responsible for the maturing of the tourism industry of the island or province,<sup>83</sup> there can be no question that it has been celebrated as a benchmark in experiential tourism and acknowledged as a local flagship in a highly competitive and ever-evolving global tourism industry.

## Conclusion

Since early in the twentieth-century tourism trends and strategies in Cape Breton have mirrored those encountered globally—growing from leisure activities for the few to an economically significant industry for the masses. As was the case for Nova Scotia as a whole, strategic approaches to tourism during this period have by and large been driven by government and government-funded bodies. Alongside this has been the evolution of a Cape Breton identity, sometimes misrepresented by outsiders but increasingly valued and



expressed from within. The effects of both of these characterizations are evidenced in today's Cape Breton tourist landscape: heritage sites and restored properties commemorate the island's past; transport infrastructure beckons visitors to tour a series of "trails," each with its own historical or nature-based connotation; and carefully branded marketing materials contain a variety of images that are both real and perceived symbols of the island's past and present.

When Celtic Colours was founded, it signalled a different sort of response to the island's socio-economic and cultural circumstances, and over time, it would become a significant component of the island's postindustrial tourism strategy. As was occurring elsewhere, it represented a cultural turn in tourism—specifically, one that saw festivals as substantial opportunities for rural regeneration and resilience while responding to a growing demand for direct participation in experiences that enable lasting memories. It is important to acknowledge that amid this shift, the image of Nova Scotia and Cape Breton had long been institutionalized for the tourist gaze as a place of natural beauty. It was difficult to evade being caught in this tension for the festival, but linking it to the celebration of the vibrant fall colours gave it a new dimension that appealed to the objectives of tourism managers to extend the short summer season. While this reimagining was not entirely disassociated from past tropes, it focused on enabling the experience of living cultures rather than the presentation of a series of artifacts. Further, although genuine concerns and risks associated with cultural commodification existed, those involved in the festival's establishment (e.g., Foulds and MacDonald, the Celtic Colours Festival Society, participating communities, etc.) made a commitment to nurturing culture and human interaction.<sup>84</sup> Celtic Colours therefore represented a turning point in Cape Breton's tourism history.

The effects of its approach (an experiential style of tourism with the festival as a centrepiece) have been witnessed in a variety of ways—not all of which might be obvious. For example, although there had been a strong response to counter potential cultural loss in the 1970s (i.e., the prospect that Cape Breton fiddlers were quickly vanishing) and there were a number of highly talented and skilled Cape Breton musicians (e.g., John Allan Cameron, Jerry Holland, John Morris Rankin, and Kinnon Beaton), the island's musical industry remained relatively fragile and dispersed. Part of the motivation behind Celtic Colours was to assist in professionalizing the music industry—something it has contributed to in ways that continue to have significant impact. This has

included the birth of a new generation of fiddlers, the upsurge of a local and national music industry, the ability for Cape Breton musicians to make a living from their music on the island and globally, and improved facilities across the island where professional-calibre performances and recordings can now take place throughout the year.

While acknowledging the substantial contributions made by Celtic Colours to the professionalization of the island's music industry, it would be remiss not to mention a few other notable developments since the festival's establishment that have also been influential in this regard. Particularly, the institutions behind these interact with the festival in various ways, and together with Celtic Colours, they symbolize the collaborative and concerted efforts of Cape Breton institutions, individuals, communities, government, and government-funded entities toward more of a destination tourism approach. For example, two institutions that had been languishing somewhat before the inauguration of the festival have been totally transformed and revitalized in the past two decades. This is not to suggest that Celtic Colours is entirely responsible for this, but rather through collaboration, adapting to opportunities and change, and strong leadership, the institutions have become equally important components of Cape Breton's present-day tourism strategy. Additionally, their resurgence is emblematic of broader signs of hope, prosperity, resilience, and cultural identity in Cape Breton.

Firstly, the Gaelic College at Saint Anne (Colaisde na Gaidhlig) has evolved into a dynamic and expanding institution fully integrated with the festival but also offering a widening variety of other experiences, including its own festival held in the spring (Kitchenfest). Meanwhile, Iona's Baile nan Gàidheal / Highland Village, established over fifty years ago, has flourished as the newest branch of the Nova Scotia Museum complex to foster a Living History Museum dedicated to celebrating and exploring all aspects of the Celtic experience in Cape Breton. It has emerged as one of the most successful museum attractions in all of Nova Scotia and similarly works closely with Celtic Colours as part of providing visitors a chance to experience living cultures.

A new institution that offers "hands-on" learning and participation and further indicates the changed tourism landscape is the Celtic Music Interpretation Centre. Located in Judique, it was opened in 2006 through funding from the local community as well as provincial and federal governments. It has a mandate to preserve and protect Celtic music, and it does so through a

series of public performances and a lot of back-scene recording and archiving. It serves a broad community of performers in southern Inverness County and operates year round, including during Celtic Colours, when numerous community-based events are hosted by the centre.<sup>85</sup> Finally, the role played by Cape Breton University in sharing, highlighting, sustaining, and teaching the living cultures of Cape Breton must not be underestimated. Its Beaton Institute has always had a mandate to preserve the Celtic traditions of Cape Breton. Since the 1990s, this mission has become more prominent through relocation to dramatically improved accommodations and the provision of a focal point for a cultural stream in Cape Breton studies. Additionally, the Centre for Cape Breton Studies has morphed into a multidisciplinary series of integrated offerings at various levels within the university. New faculty and staff offer a range of programs in aspects of the cultural heritage of the island, enhancing the understanding and recognition of Cape Breton's living cultures. Certain events are showcased during Celtic Colours that, once more, complement the suite of experiences that are on offer.

Returning to Celtic Colours, the economic impact of the festival has been well documented over the years; however, perhaps less addressed in reports is the way in which this story is indicative of a highly developed “branding” of Cape Breton, with the Celtic Colours imprint at the forefront. According to Brown, the brand of Cape Breton is a formidable component of the national tourism industry and has enabled Cape Breton to be globally competitive.<sup>86</sup> This success has led to highly specialized expertise within Celtic Colours and on the island more broadly, around what constitutes effective experiential tourism. The fiscal value of such knowledge can be determined through tourism statistics and indicators. In 2018 alone, Nova Scotia had the highest tourism revenue (\$2.61 billion) on record, despite encountering a modest decline in visitation. The majority of this was generated by nonresidents of the province—a solid percentage of whom fell under the global trend of travellers seeking “local” experiences that could lead to personal change. Cape Breton was a major destination contributing to this; recently celebrated as one of the best islands in the world to visit by Condé Nast,<sup>87</sup> between 2015 and 2018, it had the second highest number of hotel room nights sold in the province.<sup>88</sup>

This is not to suggest that a festival like Celtic Colours and an experiential tourism approach offer an economic and/or social panacea, or that the benefits of such a strategy always outweigh the risks, or that success represents the absence of challenges or issues.<sup>89</sup> As has been observed in various industries

and sectors around the world, including those that were originally the economic backbone of Cape Breton, one small change can result in vulnerability and ultimate decline. Celtic Colours was developed at a time when the global tourism industry was undergoing a cultural turn that focused on festivals and mechanisms that made more personal and memorable experiences possible. The global popularization of Celtic culture also played into this. There can be no question of the festival's various achievements; however, it is likely that trends within the industry and place-based conditions (e.g., aging population) will modify further over time—in both positive and negative ways—and adaptation in response to those would be essential to continued success.

For instance, a developing component of both the provincial and Cape Breton tourism strategy is to increase engagement with the cruise ship market considerably. As a result, the cruise tourism destinations and patterns have erupted to produce upward of 153,000 visitors to the port of Sydney in 2019,<sup>90</sup> and the trend is expanding. Similarly, golf tourism, sparked by the development of two new “world-class” courses in Inverness, has projected Cape Breton into a travellers' world consciousness, which repeatedly raises it to a central place in world rankings.<sup>91</sup> Such developments are important to Cape Breton's evolving tourism future and involve ongoing consideration as to how they fit into a holistic, destination-based agenda as well as the degree to which they necessitate the availability of different types of tourism experiences.

As indicated earlier, some of the risk involved with festival- and experiential-based tourism is centred on the commodification of culture. As has been seen in the pre-1990s-era tourism in Cape Breton, it can also lead to questions around how to “reconcile the private reality with the public image . . . whereby images eventually usurp the reality.”<sup>92</sup> Celtic Colours is not responsible for the creation or persistence of such an issue; rather, in keeping with MacKinnon, it is vital for tourists and tourism decision-makers alike to see the real complexity associated with cultures that are presented through festivals and to think both critically and sensitively in their engagement with those. Similarly, it will be important for those involved in tourism in Cape Breton to continue finding ways of engaging visitors so that such reflection can be fostered.

Related to this and in light of Celtic Colours' emphasis on experiencing the island's living cultures, it is also worth reflecting on the fact that culture regularly changes over time and space through diffusion—it is not static and can be hybrid in nature.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, in a move away from the “tartanism” of

the past, Nova Scotia's Culture Action Plan recognizes the evolution of culture that occurs through human interaction and new forms of expression, acknowledging diversity as a fundamental aspect of Nova Scotian identity. To complicate matters further, it is necessary to understand that "there is no single Celtic language or culture."<sup>94</sup> When these traits are cross-referenced with the definition of "living culture," the difficulty in delineating between "living" and some alternative state becomes clear. It would be equally challenging to distinguish places on the basis of having a living culture or not, since all culture is arguably living and transmitted between generations over time in one form or another. These practicalities present Celtic Colours with the opportunity to continue exploring Cape Breton's living cultures as a means of reimagining these to their full effect in the future.

As Celtic Colours approaches its twenty-fifth year, it is a powerful symbol of Cape Breton's present-day experiential approach to tourism—particularly one that emphasizes living cultures. It aligns well with Nova Scotia's tourism strategy, which includes "world-class experiences" and aspirations to achieve \$4 billion in annual tourism revenue by 2024.<sup>95</sup> With the relatively recent establishment of the Destination Cape Breton Association (DCBA) in 2011, the island and stakeholders such as the festival are increasingly turning their attention to destination tourism. A distinct aspect of this strategy is the imperative to provide consistently excellent experiences, and as was the case for the music industry when Celtic Colours began, this will require an exercise of professional development across the island's tourism sector.<sup>96</sup> Technology and social media are also key features—ones that expand a visitor's ability to "experience" Cape Breton over time and space. In this regard, and while acknowledging that there is always room for improvement, perhaps much can be learned from Cape Breton's tourism history and, within that, the emergence of Celtic Colours as a hallmark brand.

## Notes

1. Zuelow, *A History of Modern Tourism*, 12. Where an entire source such as a book or article has informed a viewpoint or argument, no page number will be listed in the footnotes. This acknowledges that the work as a whole has contributed to our understanding rather than text found on a specific page or in a particular segment within that source. Similarly, notes will not include page numbers where such detail does not exist (e.g., web pages, etc.).

2. Sharpley and Telfer, *Tourism and Development*, 11–12.
3. United Nations World Tourism Organization, “International Tourism Highlights,” <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/pdf/10.18111/9789284421152>.
4. Genç and Genç, “Market-Oriented Innovations in Tourism,” 51; Dolnicar, “Market Segmentation in Tourism,” 18.
5. Romão, *Tourism, Territory and Sustainable Development*, 63–64; Smith, “Sense of Place,” 220; Salazar, “Opportunities and Threats.”
6. Smith, Macleod, and Robertson, *Key Concepts in Tourist Studies*, 94; Poria, Butler, and Airey, “Core of Heritage Tourism,” 238–54.
7. Salazar, “Community-Based Cultural Tourism,” 10; Johnson, “Realizing Rural Community-Based Tourism Development,” 151–52; Okazaki, “Community-Based Tourism Model,” 511–12, Murphy, *Tourism*, 153.
8. Wood, *Sustainable Tourism on a Finite Planet*; Graci and Dodds, *Sustainable Tourism in Island Destinations*, Clarke, “Framework of Approaches to Sustainable Tourism,” 224–30.
9. Wang and Pizam, *Destination Marketing and Management*; Smith, “Experiential Tourism around the World and at Home,” 1–14; Framke, “Destination as a Concept,” 92–108; Pine and Gilmore, *Experience Economy*. Experiential tourism involves a move away from “mass tourism” whereby individuals seek and directly participate in experiences that can facilitate lasting memories. Other forms of tourism such as cultural, heritage, nature, and so on are subsets of this; Smith, “Experiential Tourism around the World and at Home,” 8. Destination tourism refers to a coordinated effort across all relevant service providers in a particular location to offer tourists high-quality experiences while enhancing competitiveness in the tourism industry for that destination as well as managing the effects of tourism on that place. See United Nations World Tourism Organization, *Practical Guide to Tourism Destination Management*, 2.
10. Celtic Colours International Festival, “About Celtic Colours,” <https://celtic-colours.com/about/>.
11. Tourism Nova Scotia, “Celtic Colours International Festival,” <https://celtic-colours.com/page/4/>.
12. Shannon, “Island on the Brink?”; Tomblin and Locke, *Good Governance*.
13. What composes “Celtic” culture, music, and identity is a source of ongoing debate across various disciplines, including arguments that contemporary romanticization of Celtic culture is based on images constructed for tourism and Pan-Celtic festivals. See Kneafsey, “Tourism Images and the Construction,” 123–38; Porter, “Introduction,” 205–24. The Oxford Dictionary (2019) defines “Celtic” as “relating to the Celts or their languages”; however,

in light of known complexities in defining “Celtic” and the subject matter of this paper, we extend this understanding to encompass the ancestral sense of identity or affinity with Celtic culture regardless of geographic location and the creation of cultural outputs—real or invented—that have been informed by Celtic traditions and/or images of the past and present; Tacla and Johnston, “New Perspectives in Celtic Studies,” 613–20; Harvey, Jones, McInroy, and Milligan, “Timing and Spacing Celtic Geographies,” 1–18; Hale and Payton, *New Directions in Celtic Studies*.

14. Burrill, *Away*.
15. Prior to this investment, the roads were thought to be impassable during certain seasons and conditions. One of the first Roman Catholic missionaries to Cape Breton, Father Francois Lejamtel (from 1792 to 1819) was recorded to have said he would “never embark [on the passage] in the autumn unless it were to save [his] life from some other menace”; Chiasson, *Cheticamp History and Acadian Tradition*. Writing on the early transport history of northern Cape Breton, McDonald described the roads as “narrow, bumpy, and hollow. After a rain storm you could start a fish farm in some of the holes in the road.” McDonald, *Transportation in Northern Cape Breton*.
16. MacEachern, *Natural Selections*.
17. McKay, “Tartanism Triumphant,” 5–47; MacLennan, *Scotchman’s Return and Other Essays*; MacNeil, *Highland Heart in Nova Scotia*.
18. Bird, *This Is Nova Scotia*; Dennis, *Cape Breton Over*.
19. Burrill, *Away*.
20. This is to suggest not that tourism did not exist on a global scale prior to World War II but that the pace of its expansion, the increased diversity of tourists, and the presence of a readily identifiable industry can be traced to this period. As a result, this phase is sometimes referred to as “mass tourism” or “modern tourism.” Lickorish and Jenkins, *Introduction to Tourism*; Zuelow, *History of Modern Tourism*; Sezgin and Yolal, “Golden Age of Mass Tourism.”
21. Zuelow, *History of Modern Tourism*.
22. Darbelly and Stock, “Tourism as Complex Interdisciplinary Research Object,” 441–58; Gibson, “Learning Destinations”; Faulkner and Russell, “Chaos and Complexity in Tourism,” 93–102.
23. Events in the lead-up to this, such as the classification of the Louisbourg site as a National Historic Park in 1940, laid important groundwork for discussion. Judith V. Campbell, *Report of the Human History of Cape Breton Highlands National Park*, manuscript on file, National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, Parks Canada, Halifax, 1973.
24. McKay, “Tartanism Triumphant.”

25. Macdonald, *Speeches of Angus L. Macdonald*.
26. Sparling, "Cape Breton Island," 49–64.
27. Henderson, *Angus L. Macdonald*; McKay and Bates, *In the Province of History*.
28. Province of Nova Scotia, "Canada's Ocean Playground," <https://archives.novascotia.ca/tourism/>, is a vast digital archive of tourist advertising for Nova Scotia up to the 1970s. It is remarkable for its completeness, yet it does not reflect much attention to Cape Breton by early tourist promoters, save for the requisite images of the Cabot Trail's vistas of solitary splendour. It was as if there were no people in Cape Breton at all, except for the occasional fishers chasing salmon or tourists gazing at the splendour from their automobiles.
29. Beaton and Muise, "Canso Causeway," 39–69; Hunter and Corbin, "Built for Going Away."
30. Morgan, *Rise Again!*
31. Bickerton, *Nova Scotia, Ottawa, and the Politics*.
32. Dewing, "Federal Government Policy on Arts and Culture."
33. Thompson, "Myth of the Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler," 5–26.
34. Province of Nova Scotia, "Canada's Ocean Playground," <https://archives.novascotia.ca/tourism/>.
35. Graham, *Cape Breton Fiddle*; MacInnes, *Journey in Celtic Music*.
36. Bonet, "Cultural Tourism," 166–71; Craik, "Culture of Tourism," 113–36.
37. Light, "Heritage and Tourism," 144–58.
38. Stewart, Hayward, Devlin, and Kirby, "'Place' of Interpretation," 257–66; Beeho and Prentice, "Conceptualizing the Experiences of Heritage Tourists," 75–87; Crang, "On the Heritage Trail," 341–55.
39. Ashworth and Larkham, *Building a New Heritage*; Bond and Falk, "Tourism and Identity-Related Motivations," 430–42.
40. Nath and Saha, "Theoretical Positioning of Self and Social Identities," 115–28; Prentice, "Experiential Cultural Tourism," 5–26.
41. Thorne, "Place-Based Cultural Tourism," <https://conscioustourism.wordpress.com/tag/steven-thorne/>.
42. Renamed Cape Breton University in 2005 through the Cape Breton University Act.
43. MacNeil, *Spirit in the Face of Decline*."
44. This professionalization was about not just performing but also the technology to support the delivery and documentation of that performance. Joe Bushell opened the island's first professional recording studio in 1989 at Frenchvale. Morgan, *Rise Again!*
45. Edwardson, *Canadian Content*.



46. Laventhol and Horwath, "Cape Breton Tourism Strategy: Draft Final Report" (unpublished manuscript, Beaton Institute, Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS, 1986).
47. The origins of this date all the way back to the early 1920s when Nova Scotia's "Tourist Investigation Committee" recommended an "Old Home Summer" project to "encourage Nova Scotians by birth or descent, living in New England, to embark on a sentimental journey" home. Province of Nova Scotia, "Nova Scotia Archives."
48. Brown, "Come on Home," 309–18; Feintuch, *In the Blood*, 227–33.
49. Fletcher, "John Allan Cameron," 3.
50. "Joella Foulds," in Feintuch, *In the Blood*, 244–57.
51. Gibson and Connell, *Music Festivals and Regional Development in Australia*; Lemky and Joliffe, "Mining Heritage and Tourism," 144–57; MacDonald and Joliffe, "Cultural Rural Tourism," 307–22.
52. Mair, "Global Restructuring and Local Responses," 1–45; Briedenhann and Wickens, "Tourism Routes," 71–79.
53. Though festivals are a long-standing feature of places, with events dating back to the early 1800s, Gibson and Connell suggest that they grew "exponentially" after the 1980s "as people celebrate[d] local and regional cultures, as music styles diversif[ied], and as councils, business coalitions and non-profit groups use[d] festivals to promote tourism and stimulate regional development." Gibson and Connell, *Music Festivals*, 3.
54. Picard and Robinson, "Remaking Worlds," 1–31; Hughes, "Urban Revitalisation," 119–35.
55. Briedenhann and Wickens, "Tourism Routes"; Williams and Shaw, *Tourism and Economic Development*.
56. Ma and Lew, "Historical and Geographical Context," 1–19; Gibson and Connell, *Music Festivals*.
57. Jeong and Santos, "Cultural Politics and Contested Place Identity," 640–56.
58. Waitt, "Urban Festivals," 513–37; Bankston and Henry, "Spectacles of Ethnicity," 377–407.
59. Seed, "Outdoor Resources Directory," 10.
60. Feintuch, *In the Blood*; Joella Foulds, interviewed in Sydney, NS, 14 October 2010; Foulds in Feintuch, *In the Blood*.
61. Readily identifiable artists included the Rankin Family, Natalie MacMaster, Ashley MacIsaac, and Rita MacNeil.
62. Mahalik, *10 Nights without Sleep*; Foulds, interviewed in Sydney, 2010; MacDonald, "Vibrant Array of Celtic Colours Set for C.B.," B19.
63. Province of Nova Scotia, "Nova Scotia Archives."

64. Brown, "Come on Home."
65. Important support would also come through the Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation (ECBC). ECBC was founded in 1985 to manage federal monies aimed at facilitating economic development outside of the mining industry in Cape Breton. While it initially collaborated with the IDD arm of DEVCO, ECBC was eventually asked to assume full responsibility while DEVCO focused on the mining industry only. DEVCO was eventually dissolved in 2010, which led to a full transition to ECBC. In 2014, ECBC was folded into the Atlantic Canadian Opportunities Agency (ACOA); CTV News, "ACOA Takes over Cape Breton Enterprise Corp," <https://atlantic.ctvnews.ca/acoa-takes-over-cape-breton-enterprise-corp-1.1737935>; Ayers, "DEVCO Ready to Dissolve"; Goodale, "Cape Breton Development Corporation Divestiture Authorization and Dissolution Act," <https://openparliament.ca/debates/1999/11/15/ralph-goodale-1/only/>.
66. The Celtic Colours Festival Society secured a valuable \$277,000 grant from the Year of Music initiative—a significant contribution toward the festival's overall operating costs of \$600,000 in 1997. Macdonald, "Am Braighe Editor Critical," 18.
67. Mahalik, *10 Nights without Sleep*; Celtic Colours International Festival, *Celtic Colours International Festival Booklet* (9–17 October 1998).
68. Celtic Colours International Festival, *Festival Booklet*.
69. The basis for the program overall was that cultural tourists tend to stay longer and spend more money than other types of tourists. As a nine-day festival dispersed across the island of Cape Breton, Celtic Colours stood a good chance of fostering such trends.
70. The Honourable John James Kinley, Nova Scotia's twenty-ninth lieutenant governor, remarked in 1997, "The world has already discovered what Nova Scotians have always known. Musicians like the Barra MacNeils from Sydney Mines, the Rankin family from Mabou, and Natalie MacMaster from Inverness County prove we make the best music anywhere. The celebration of uniquely Nova Scotian music, with its roots in Celtic, Acadian, and Mi'kmaq cultures, helped build a record year for tourism. This year Nova Scotia's tourism industry grew by 6 percent, the fastest growth rate in 25 years." Hon. John James Kinley, Nova Scotia Legislature, Fifty-Sixth General Assembly, Sixth Session, Thursday, 20 November 1997, Halifax, NS.
71. For the purposes of this chapter, living culture, also recognized as intangible cultural heritage or living cultural heritage, can be understood as the daily "practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills handed down from generation to generation"—be that through lived experience or

- reproduction. See UNESCO, “Safeguarding Communities’ Living Heritage,” <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pfo000261971>. As per Richard MacKinnon’s research, this can include “storytelling . . . ways of working and making a living . . . music, [and] festivals.” MacKinnon, *Discovering Cape Breton Folklore*, 19.
72. The ad welcomed “everyone to gather and celebrate our living Celtic culture”; see Celtic Colours International Festival, *Festival Booklet*.
  73. Celtic Colours International Festival.
  74. The original mission statement was “the Celtic Colours Festival Society is a non-profit volunteer society formed to promote and maintain the Celtic cultures of Cape Breton, the Gaelic language, music, arts and crafts; and to heighten national and international awareness of the natural beauty of Cape Breton Island by the creation and presentation of an annual international festival celebrating our Celtic heritage and music, to be held during the beauty of autumn colours at various venues around the Island.” See Celtic Colours International Festival, “Mission Statement,” quoted in Ferrel, *Fiddler’s Heaven*.
  75. Newbern and Fletcher, “Fall Getaways,” 12; *Reporter* (Port Hawkesbury, NS), 21 September 1999, 13.
  76. Celtic Colours International Festival, “Mission Statement”
  77. Province of Nova Scotia, “Province Makes Major Investment in Celtic Colours,” media release, 28 June 2002, accessed 4 November 2014, <http://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=20020628003>.
  78. Province of Nova Scotia, “Cape Breton Named One of the Best Islands in the World to Visit,” media release, 17 July 2009, accessed 13 February 2015, <http://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=20090717007>.
  79. “Rodney MacDonald” in Feintuch, *In the Blood*, 234–43.
  80. There was great anticipation surrounding the potential economic benefits of Celtic Colours following a 1994 strategic plan by the Cape Breton Cultural Economic Development Authority (CBCEDA) that predicted that it could become “an international cultural tourist attraction.” Brown, “Island Tourism Marketing,” 27. By the 1990s, Nova Scotia was supporting a variety of music festivals across the province to some extent, primarily concentrated in Halifax; however, none were Cape Breton based and none had a “Celtic” flavour.
  81. Scott and Pelley, “Cape Breton’s Celtic Colours International Festival,” 16.
  82. Colley, “Local Businesses Reap Benefits”; MacDonald, “No Surprise Here.”
  83. In recent years, this has included the establishment of Destination Cape Breton (2011) and the formal adoption of a Nova Scotia experiential tourism toolkit (2011).

84. Thayer Scott and Pelley, "Cape Breton's Celtic Colours International Festival"; Foulds in Feintuch, *In the Blood*.
85. Certain features do not exist outside of the main tourist season or occur on a very limited basis.
86. Brown, "Island Tourism Marketing."
87. Condé Nast, "The Best Islands in the World," <https://www.cntraveler.com/galleries/2014-10-20/top-30-islands-in-the-world-readers-choice-awards-2014>.
88. Tourism Nova Scotia, "2018 Tourism Performance," <https://tourismns.ca/sites/default/files/2019-04/Media%20Kit%20-%202018%20Nova%20Scotia%20Tourism%20Performance.pdf>. There is a high degree of seasonality in the tourism industry in Cape Breton, which has implications for indicators.
89. Whether economic, cultural, or a combination of both, "development" on Cape Breton Island has produced a mixed legacy of costs, benefits, challenges, and tensions; for a further illustration of this mixed legacy, see chapter 10 in this collection.
90. McNeil, "Record Season for Sydney Port."
91. "Three Cape Breton Courses Crack Golf Digest Top 100," *Cape Breton Post*, 12 January 2018.
92. MacKinnon, *Discovering Cape Breton Folklore*, 182.
93. McEwan, "Geography, Culture and Global Change," 273–89.
94. Tacla and Johnston, "New Perspectives in Celtic Studies"; Hale and Payton, *New Directions in Celtic Studies*; "More Celtic Areas Represented," *Reporter*, 21 September 1999, 12.
95. Tourism Nova Scotia, "Tourism Nova Scotia's Strategy," <https://tourismns.ca/plans-and-reports/tourism-nova-scotias-strategy>.
96. Two contemporary websites make the point. The Destination Cape Breton website highlights experiential elements of the tourist on the island, while the recently created World Tourism Institute at Cape Breton University stresses the importance of sector-wide professional development. See <https://www.cbisland.com/> and <https://www.cbu.ca/wti/the-cape-breton-island-tourism-training-network/>.

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## Afterword

### Cape Breton as Microcosm of Capitalist Modernity

*Alvin Finkel*

The Mi'kmaw region of Unama'ki, the Acadian outpost of Île Royale, the partially Gaelic-speaking island of Ceap Breatainn: the names all speak to the uniqueness of Cape Breton. And the peoples of this wondrously beautiful island have certainly produced unique communities and a sense of belonging that the island's famous bard Rita MacNeil expressed in her song, "Could This Be My Island Too?"

The chapters in this broad-based collection speak to that sense of belonging. But they also speak to the ways in which, as Karl Marx put it, people "make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, because Cape Breton in the "long twentieth century" was integrated into the modernizing capitalist industrial world, its people, while remaining social actors, found that the stage upon which they acted was shaped by external forces over which they exercised increasingly limited control. The result is that the economic, social, and cultural phenomena that the chapters describe prove to be as much a microcosm of the fate of communities across the world engulfed by an increasingly monopolistic and all-reaching capitalist system as emblems of a unique society. Economic life, cultural life, and social life within Cape Breton, while reflecting the unique efforts of its people to maintain autonomy and dignity, have also followed patterns that mimic the impact of modernity wherever

it has arrived. So these fine chapters collectively tell a story of industrialization and modernization that, while focusing on the people of Cape Breton, becomes a lens in terms of economics, society, and culture for the broader industrial capitalist world that the long twentieth century produced.

This afterword tries to capture some of the ways in which what has happened to Cape Breton parallel what has happened elsewhere in Canada and beyond. The unequal battle between the power of capital, direct and indirect, and the efforts of everyday people to preserve their heritages and traditions emerged throughout *Cape Breton in the Long Twentieth Century*. It is a battle that is global and has some victories for underdogs, but overall the practices and ideology of global capital have remained hegemonic.

Those who have lost most within Cape Breton are the people whose history on the island and within today's Canada dates back over ten thousand years. The Mi'kmaq once composed an egalitarian nation of integrated communities across the Atlantic provinces and the Southern Gaspé region of Quebec—Mi'kma'ki—that had cooperatively developed seasonal uses of land throughout their collective territory. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, particularly after the British defeat of their French allies in 1758, their autonomy and their integration across a wide region were limited by the efforts of Europeans to take control of the geography and use the lands in ways that suited imperial strategies on the one hand and settler goals for individual prosperity within an imperial framework on the other.<sup>2</sup> Ironically, in Cape Breton, the mainly Scottish settlers who largely displaced the Mi'kmaq were themselves, as we note later on, victims of capitalist dispossession. In an imperial capitalist world, where intersecting hierarchies of class, race, and religion determined entitlements, some groups of dispossessed white people could re-establish rights to land by dispossessing nonwhite, non-Christian Indigenous peoples. For the masters of the imperial world, such displacement made sense both because they viewed Indigenous people in a settlement context as resistant to abandoning traditional land use in favour of imperial objectives and because the export of peoples deemed surplus to capitalist goals in European homelands reduced social tensions at home.

In Cape Breton, European diseases, followed by settler encroachments—about thirty thousand Scottish settlers arrived on the island from 1815 to 1838—had marginalized a once thriving Mik'maw population whose communities counted only about five hundred souls by the mid-1800s.<sup>3</sup> They managed to maintain separate, if poverty-stricken, communities despite the

encroachments on their lands and livelihoods by blending their traditional ways with adaptations to the colonial society that had enveloped them: “Flexible and mobile, Mi’kmaq families were engaged in a mixed economy, in which men and women deployed some of their labour, some of the time in new ways—working for wages, selling ‘handy work’—while maintaining older practices of seasonal family migration and ties to an economically and culturally significant locale.”<sup>4</sup>

Martha Walls’s contribution to this collection, chapter 5, “The Disposition of the Ladies: Mi’kmaq Women and the Removal of Kun’tewiktuk / King’s Road Reserve, Sydney, Nova Scotia,” illustrates starkly that the land pressures on the Mi’kmaq did not let up in the twentieth century. Indigenous people continued to be viewed as lesser human beings who could be compelled to move to inferior locations if white people wanted that land for expanding cities or some other purpose. Walls provides a penetrating glimpse at the dominant Euro-Canadian attitudes toward Indigenous women that served to rationalize the relocation of Indigenous people outside Sydney’s city limits. The King’s Road Exchequer Court hearing in 1915 that determined the fate of the King’s Road Reserve gave no voice at all to the Mi’kmaq women whose families were threatened with relocation. Instead the court heard twenty-six supporters of relocation who, between them, stereotyped the women as slovenly alcoholics who could only be a bad influence on a white Christian community. That many of them worked as domestics cleaning the homes and businesses of Euro-Canadians in Sydney could be conveniently ignored. Only three Mi’kmaq witnesses and five allies got to speak to the hearing, and they refuted the racist, stereotyped, gendered views of the Mi’kmaq women presented by the vast majority of witnesses. The central Canadian judge brought in for the hearing accepted the views of the racists and ruled that the reserve had to be relocated outside Sydney’s city limits.

Such relocations occurred across Canada and racist stereotypes of Indigenous women and men were constantly used to rationalize profit-driven Euro-Canadian efforts to steal Indigenous lands. Those were under threat from the moment when settlement replaced the fur trade as the goal of an expanding Euro-Canadian presence on the lands that compose today’s Canada. The European view was that Indigenous people merely roamed the lands that they had inhabited for millennia but could not claim title to them because they supposedly did not use that land for “civilized” purposes. Therefore, seizures of their land were considered lawful, though practical considerations

often led to guarantees, largely broken in practice, of providing “reserves” of land for Indigenous people.<sup>5</sup>

Well before Confederation, seizures of Indigenous land were common. European settlers did not seek Indigenous approval for lands where they settled. Local European-settler governments sometimes negotiated treaties that reserved certain lands for Indigenous people. But the government of the United Province of Canada (Quebec and Ontario from 1840 to 1867), for example, admitted an unwillingness to prevent settlers from encroaching upon lands reserved for Indigenous peoples.<sup>6</sup> In British Columbia, where treaties before Confederation were restricted to Vancouver Island, an onrush of Europeans seeking gold in the interior ignored the Indigenous presence on the lands, using force to get their way. Once the gold rush was over, settlers seeking to ranch or farm kept up the pressure on Indigenous peoples, eager to hold on to their traditional lands.<sup>7</sup> In the Atlantic colonies, Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) were removed from their territories, which included seasonal settlements, to make the best use of local resources and confined to a sedentary lifestyle on tiny, unproductive reserves in the 1840s and 1850s.<sup>8</sup>

Confederation changed little. Though treaties were negotiated across the Prairies, they were rarely enforced when Indigenous rights were at stake. For example, the Papaschase First Nation peoples, in what is now southwest Edmonton, were defrauded of their reserve land in 1888 and are still fighting for restitution.<sup>9</sup> Their fate was similar to that of Prairie First Nations generally, who had to fight the genocidal intentions of the federal government.<sup>10</sup>

In 1905, the federal government amended the Indian Act, the racist legislation that governed the lives of First Nations without their input, to give all towns with a population over eight thousand the right to force a relocation of reserves that were within their geographical limits or nearby. A 1911 amendment to the Indian Act reinforced the perspective of reserves as simply impediments to economic development by granting municipalities and companies alike the right to expropriate portions of reserves for roads, railways, or other public purposes. Such federal legislation eased the task of Sydney's Euro-Canadian population in their effort to force the relocation of the King's Road Reserve. Such forced relocations continued for decades in Canada. In 1911, the struggle of the Songhees people of Victoria, who had lived within the boundaries of what became that city for four thousand years, to retain the reserve that they had once negotiated ended tragically with their forced removal east of Esquimalt Harbour.<sup>11</sup> Similarly in 1913, Vancouver



forced the removal of an ancient Squamish village in the False Creek area, which had received reserve status in 1877. Community members moved to other Squamish Nation reserves in the area and received no compensation until a prolonged struggle led to a land-claims settlement in 2000. Other displacements followed.<sup>12</sup> Such immoral removals across Canada continued even after World War II, with its stinging message about the genocidal impacts of racism. Meanwhile, Indigenous peoples throughout Canada in areas where highly profitable hydroelectricity projects were planned were moved with no thought to the impact on their traditional economic and cultural pursuits.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout all of these denials of the rights of often ancient communities to continue to exist and any other concession toward the rights of self-determination of peoples, Euro-Canadians insisted that the economic growth and profit motive extolled by the Western capitalist world gave them the right to roll over “unprogressive” Indigenous people. The latter were characterized as backward and lazy, their women trashed as dissolute and slovenly. The removal of the Indigenous community from Sydney, within this larger history, can be seen as one more tune from a Western imperialist songbook. And the resistance of Indigenous peoples and their allies to such inhuman treatment, which we witnessed in Sydney, also bore a similar shape across Canada.

Many of those responsible for acting as agents of colonialism and land theft against Indigenous Canadians were themselves victims or descendants of victims of land theft in Europe before coming to the Americas.

This was precisely the case for many of the Scots-descended migrants to Cape Breton. The Highland clearances involved decisions by landlords, who once were content with feudal-origin dues, to treat the land that they owned and the people on that land as simply factors of capitalist production. The grazing of sheep and the maximizing of the productivity of the land argued for throwing most tenants off the land, which forced many to emigrate from Scotland in order to survive. When economic circumstances in their new Cape Breton homes proved dire, they moved again in search of new opportunities, particularly if they were young, single adults. Those who left the island were often later arrivals who were only able to acquire poor land. In a society of individualist accumulation of wealth, their lot, relegated to soil of questionable value, made moving on seem the most rational choice, particularly when blight threatened them with starvation if they stayed. There were no built-in guarantees within Cape Breton society or within other capitalist

frameworks that would allow them to bridge times of some crop production with times of limited or no crops.

Beginning in the 1840s, chain migrations from Cape Breton, Atlantic Canada, and Quebec to the “Boston states,” then later to Central and Western Canada, emerged. The push of poor economic conditions in market economies and the pull of land or jobs that seemed to offer households better possibilities created unplanned exoduses in which those who left first used their communications with family and friends left behind to persuade many more to follow. Meanwhile, parallel economic circumstances were bringing immigrants into British North American colonies, including Quebec and the Atlantic colonies, even as many others left these colonies mainly for the United States. The classic case was the Irish famine of 1845 and 1846, which resulted in a million deaths and two million emigrants in a population of nine million. Their deaths were the result of deliberate British policy rather than local crop failures as such. While the potato crop upon which the native Irish depended had failed miserably both years because of blight, the English and Scots settlers who had taken over the best land of Ireland over time produced enough food in 1845 and 1846 to easily feed everyone in Ireland. But the British government dismissed any idea of requiring or even encouraging the wealthy Irish farmers to provide the food needs of the Indigenous majority of the island rather than fulfilling demands from paying purchasers outside Ireland.

In 1845, a conservative British government provided relief to the Irish farmers who were dependent upon potato crops. But in 1846, when there was another crop failure due to blight, a new, liberal government rejected direct relief. Its free-enterprise ideology dictated that such social help created individual dependence upon the state rather than reinforcing the perspective that only the compulsion exercised by market forces would encourage the propertyless to seek out employers. The only help made available was to those who moved into workhouses where food was provided in return for work, though the accommodations were brutal and families were split up so that children could become servants to well-off families. With millions starving but only 130,000 spots available in Irish workhouses, many taken by people too weakened by the famine to survive the forced manual work of the workhouse, widespread death and immigration were inevitable. The application of market ideology proved murderous and arguably genocidal against the indigenous Irish.<sup>14</sup>

The tragic fate of the indigenous Irish, forced to live on lands where only potatoes would grow, and of the Scottish emigrants, forced off their traditional lands so that lords could earn fortunes from sheep, may make the fate of the Cape Breton emigrants and their many counterparts throughout British North America, forced to move on to survive, seem tame. Long-term tenancy as opposed to land ownership was less common in the colonies than in Britain, where land ownership was concentrated among four thousand aristocrats. But the quality and quantity of land that European immigrants might obtain varied and the state offered no guarantees of help to those who endured short-term or long-term problems with putting food on the table. Those unable to purchase land or make a go of purchased land joined a proletariat of those who could only survive by selling their labour. That was the case on the Canadian prairie lands after the Canadian government purchased them from their legally invented owners, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), in 1869, leaving that company and the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) with much of the choicest land for free. Though the subsequent homestead laws gave ownership of plots of 160 acres to settlers who could convert a certain portion of the land to farmland, failure to meet that minimum requirement was widespread: in Alberta, from 1905 to 1930, only 54 percent of homesteaders managed to secure titles to their lands, while in Saskatchewan from 1911 to 1931, a mere 43 percent were able to meet the requirements. Most farmers who failed to "prove up" had little option but to become urban and industrial workers, sometimes, like their Atlantic counterparts, moving far from their homes within their region or moving to the United States or another part of Canada. Even many who did prove up found that their homesteads would not yield a living. They needed to buy land that had been set aside for the CPR and HBC, and the credit payments for loans to make such purchases at the inflated values set by the companies drove many farmers off the land or needing to combine farming with off-farm work.<sup>15</sup>

While their lot may be viewed as far worse than that of the Cape Breton migrants, Irish and Scottish forced emigrants cannot be seen as the worst victims of a capitalist land system that, in its different forms, made it impossible for many farmers to survive without moving on. As our discussion of the fate of the Mi'kmaq of Cape Breton and other Indigenous people in the lands of today's Canada indicated starkly, the nonwhite conquered peoples of the European colonial world were victimized more brutally. Sticking to the British imperial world, for example, we see something akin, but ultimately far

worse, in the fate of people throughout India who were subjected to British control of their land. The British East India Company, which had been given a monopoly over much of British-controlled India, forced farmers to abandon millennial agricultural practices that relied on a variety of crops and economic arrangements over wide areas for sharing when a particular area suffered crop failures. The company replaced such diversity and reciprocity with monoculture in each area meant to yield big crops for international markets. The results were horrendous. When the rice crop failed in a large area of Bengal in 1770, the company, taking the position that the British government would take in Ireland in 1846, forbade the export of foodstuffs from unaffected areas of Bengal to the famine areas. They did not want to create any expectation among their forced servants that they would be fed whether or not they produced a crop during a given year. The result was ten million deaths among an estimated thirty million Bengalis.<sup>16</sup> There were so many deaths that the company pleaded to Britain for financial aid (for the company, not the famine victims) because its profits took a hit from so great a loss of workers. Britain responded by giving the company a monopoly of the American tea market, which in turn led to the Boston Tea Party in 1773, which helped launch the American Revolution.<sup>17</sup>

The starving Bengalis were given no possibility of immigrating elsewhere, either within India or to the Americas. That was a choice only given to white people such as the Irish and Scots. Similar circumstances led to ten million deaths of Tamils in South India from 1781 to 1783 and another ten million deaths in North India in 1783–84 and many millions more deaths in later famines.<sup>18</sup> So while the fate of the desperate Cape Bretoners of the 1840s who felt forced to migrate seems mild compared to the fate of the Irish famine emigrants of the same decade, even the latter, with its possibility of migration, represents a degree of privilege relative to what nonwhite peoples whose lands had been invaded by Europeans were forced to accept. That doesn't denigrate the hardships experienced by Cape Bretoners whose circumstances forced many to emigrate and encourage others to follow. Rather, it places their lived experiences within a larger history of capitalist development in which the state and capitalists alike placed profits ahead of people's rights to land tenure or stable incomes in their home communities.

The ability to migrate until they could find a degree of prosperity that motivated the Scots who came to Cape Breton but often did not stay did not exist for Indigenous peoples such as the Mi'kmaq. Both their efforts to

maintain their communities and their need to respond to the racism of the colonialists forced them to seek collective solutions and to offer resistance to colonialist plans that ignored their territorial homelands and their traditions. Such resistance was also fundamental in the lives of Black Cape Bretoners, as Claudine Bonner notes in her chapter, “Bridging Religion and Black Nationalism: The Founding of St. Philips African Orthodox Church and the Universal Negro Improvement Association Hall in Whitney Pier, 1900–1930.” The Black community in the Pier included long-time Nova Scotians as well as more recent American and Caribbean immigrants. Dominion Steel and Coal Company (DOSCO) hired many Blacks but always relegated them to the dirtiest jobs in the steel plant. The discrimination that Blacks faced resulted in a variety of forms of resistance. Black nurses, prohibited from recognized nursing programs, created their own. The creation of a local chapter of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) was key within that resistance, an affirmation of Black nationalism that linked Cape Breton Blacks with the struggles of Black people everywhere to achieve liberation.

Both the discrimination that Cape Breton Blacks faced and the resistance of the African-descended population to attacks on them as individuals and as a community echoed the experiences of Blacks across Canada throughout our national history from the colonial period to the present. While the geography of Canada did not support the plantation agriculture that made slavery widespread in some of the British colonies that formed the United States, slavery was legal in both New France and British North America until the British Parliament abolished the practice in legislation that took effect in 1834. There were also free Blacks in Canada, such as the approximately three thousand former Anglo-American slaves who fled their masters to serve the British cause during the American Revolution and were resettled in Nova Scotia after Britain accepted its defeat in that colonial uprising.

But the discriminatory treatment that they received from both the British government and the white Loyalists who cared little that they had risked their lives for Britain caused about twelve hundred of the Black Loyalists to migrate to Sierra Leone. Their embrace of a return to Africa followed the same logic as the UNIA movement more than a century later: Blacks could expect nothing but abuse from the Europeans of North America who had once enslaved them and could only regain their full humanity by returning to Africa.<sup>19</sup> But the European scramble for colonies in Africa in the latter half of the nineteenth century resulted in the imposition of quasi-slavery on most

of that continent and the deaths of millions of Africans whom the colonials overworked and underfed.<sup>20</sup> So while the UNIA's philosophy of a return to Africa might appeal to many North American Blacks conceptually, the realities of European imperialism in Africa made such a return implausible for most.

Between the end of slavery in British North America in 1834 and the end of slavery in the United States after the Union defeat of the Confederacy in 1865, an Underground Railroad operated by free Blacks, escaped slaves, and white abolitionists brought thousands of American escaped slaves to British North America. But everywhere they encountered abusive treatment, and many returned to the United States once slavery there had ended, choosing to reunite with their families in their former homes rather than bring them to British North America. In British Columbia, for example, many Blacks attempting to escape restrictive legislation in California settled on Vancouver Island as farmers, ranchers, merchants, bakers, and barbers. But an overwhelming majority, finding their white neighbours unbearably racist, chose to return to their former country in the hopes that the post-Civil War era would be marked by greater equality among the races.<sup>21</sup>

After Canada became a country, racist politicians discouraged Black immigration. About thirteen hundred African American homesteaders from Oklahoma, facing the lawlessness of their white neighbours, moved to Alberta and Saskatchewan between 1910 and 1912 in an effort to establish homesteads and Black communities. Though they proved to be successful farmers, the white supremacist leaders of Canada ordered border officials not to allow more Blacks to enter the country and sent immigration agents to the US to counsel Blacks against thinking that they could escape racism by attempting to enter Canada. Canadian governments wanted an all-white country where Indigenous people were pushed to the margins and only white people could become immigrants.<sup>22</sup> In the years that followed, Black and other nonwhite minorities faced persistent discrimination, evident in urban "renewal" programs that resulted in the levelling of Africville in Halifax and parts of Chinatowns in a number of cities.<sup>23</sup> Such forced relocations had parallels with the ongoing removals of Indigenous communities from cities.

Restrictions against Black immigration were only relaxed in the 1960s when a combination of labour shortages in Canada and the reluctance of Europeans to emigrate as their economies prospered made a whites-only immigration policy uneconomical for Canada. Nonwhite immigrants faced

a variety of obstacles, and Black organizations in particular played a large role in campaigns for human rights commissions. Over time, Black minorities in Canadian cities would form a network of organizations to fight formal and informal discriminatory practices.<sup>24</sup>

Apart from Indigenous, Black, and other racialized groups that faced discrimination in Cape Breton and elsewhere in Canada, several chapters in this collection deal with discrimination against white Europeans in Cape Breton whose cultural backgrounds were shaped in languages other than English. Ronald Labelle's chapter, "An Invisible Minority: Acadians in Industrial Cape Breton," traces the anglicization of the Acadian minority on the island. Most postconquest Acadian arrivals in Cape Breton felt compelled to assimilate to English. By the early 1900s, however, as coal mines attracted Acadian migration to the island along with some migration from French-speaking countries, Acadian organizations hoping to defend Acadian culture founded French-language schools. Rural towns with significant concentrations of French speakers such as Chéticamp resisted assimilation relatively successfully, whereas by 1950, in Reserve Mines, for example, at least 75 percent of Acadians had given up French for English. Acadian rights organizations used the courts to force Sydney to establish a French-language school and to pressure the University College of Cape Breton and the Canadian Coast Guard College to offer instruction in French. While such changes decelerated the loss of French as a first language, the descendants of the original Acadian settlers remained anglicized.

The Cape Breton experience of French speakers paralleled the experience of French speakers across Canada, specifically outside Quebec and in northern New Brunswick, where French-speaking majorities were in a stronger position to protect their language. Before the late 1960s, for example, in British Columbia, public schools offered instruction only in English. French-speaking parents who wanted their children educated in French had to be able to afford private school fees. The first crack in the BC wall of resistance to French-language instruction came in 1968, after lobbying by the *Fédération canadienne-française de la Colombie-Britannique* led to the Coquitlam school board receiving provincial approval to offer, on an experimental basis, a kindergarten program in French to be followed by instruction in French for grades 1 to 3.<sup>25</sup> Such accommodation to linguistic minorities, as in Cape Breton, came too late for the majority of those whose mother tongue was French. The 1971 census indicated that 77 percent of British Columbians aged

thirty-five to forty-four whose parents were French speakers had been anglicized by that year—that is, their home language had become English.<sup>26</sup>

French-language instruction in public schools was offered only in the earliest school grades in Alberta and Saskatchewan before the 1970s, and as in British Columbia and Cape Breton, few employers made any accommodations for French speakers.<sup>27</sup> In both provinces, while anglicization was disturbingly high in all age groups, it had galloped over time. While 42 percent of Albertans with French as their mother tongue over the age of sixty-five had made English their home language by 1971, 64 percent in the thirty-five to forty-four age bracket had followed that route.<sup>28</sup> Rates of anglicization were somewhat smaller in provinces east of Saskatchewan but were concerningly high everywhere outside Quebec and New Brunswick. The passage of the Official Languages Act by the federal government in 1969 and federal and provincial programs meant to counter anglicization and persuade Quebec that it was part of a bilingual nation-state was supposed to reverse the erosion of the French language outside Quebec and the Acadian region of New Brunswick. As in Cape Breton, organizations of francophones that fought for greater language equality and organized activities for their communities meant to preserve French as a mother tongue developed higher profiles.

But they largely failed to achieve their overall objective. La Fédération des Francophones hors Quebec reported in 1978 that the Official Languages Act and provincial policies encouraging bilingualism were mainly focused on giving English speakers working in the public sector some degree of fluency in French. They did nothing to help French-speaking minorities maintain their culture and language.<sup>29</sup> Statistician Charles Castonguay reported in 1993 that “since 1971, individual Anglicization appears to have continued at the same level among Canadian francophones. On the other hand, it is clear that they are experiencing a collective assimilation that is unprecedented: today French may well be transmitted more regularly as a legacy; but there are too few heirs.”<sup>30</sup> The 2016 census provided little evidence that the disappearance of heirs to the French language was turning around. While 91 percent of Quebecers with French as their mother tongue spoke that language at home, the figure outside Quebec was 34 percent.<sup>31</sup>

In short, the fate of French is the same in Cape Breton as in most parts of Canada. While Canadians often attempt to portray their country as a mosaic rather than the melting pot of the United States, in which home cultures and languages are lost and mix together to create one national culture, the



fate of the French language outside Quebec and northern New Brunswick challenges that comparison. The fates of other languages than English and French provide a further challenge to that characterization of Canadian “multiculturalism.” That is evident in Heather Sparling’s contribution to this collection, “Twenty-First-Century Uses for Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia Gaelic Song Collections: From Language Preservation to Revitalization and the Articulation of Cultural Values.” Sparling complicates Ian McKay’s analysis of folk culture as an effort to idealize a nation’s identity rather than document its authentic character. Antimodernism and romanticism are employed to challenge science, industrialism, and cosmopolitanism. Sparling contrasts the collection by many individuals of different backgrounds of Gaelic songs with the historical discrimination in Cape Breton against the Gaelic language and the negative characterizations of Gaels that discouraged Gaelic speakers from transmitting their language to their children. That has been the fate of many languages across Canada, from Indigenous to European, Asian, and African dialects.

While folk cultures are now celebrated across Canada in museums, designated historic sites, scholarly and popular research, and publications, the languages that have kept them distinct are threatened intergenerationally. “Overall, 72.0% of people with a non-official mother tongue speak a language other than their mother tongue at home,” reported the 2016 census.<sup>32</sup> While most of those people also sometimes use their original language at home, 18 percent reported that they never do. But the loss of mother tongues altogether was far higher among some groups, who, like the Gaels, have a long history in Canada. Only 11.5 percent of Canadians who report Ukrainian descent, for example, claim to be able to speak the language. Among those whose mother tongue is Ukrainian, just 32 percent report a good understanding of the language, though another 20 percent claim a partial understanding.<sup>33</sup> Like the Gaels of Cape Breton, Ukrainian heritage is celebrated in many ways. The ambitious Ukrainian Village reconstruction east of Edmonton is a primary example. So are the programs in Ukrainian studies at the Universities of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Toronto. But like the Cape Breton Gaels, Ukrainian immigrants to Canada, who began arriving in the 1890s, found that their language and culture were denigrated by Anglo-Canadians and that achieving success in Canada meant not just becoming fluent in English but also abandoning their own scorned language.<sup>34</sup>

The 2016 census shows that the retention of the Dutch language has been even less encouraging than the retention of Ukrainian. Only 17 percent of those claiming Dutch as their maternal language speak it well, while another 7 percent claim a partial understanding of the language. That puts into perspective the experience of Ella Barron, whose Canadian experience is the subject of Ken Donovan's chapter, "‘Everybody Was Crying’: Ella Barron, Dutch War Bride in Amsterdam and Ingonish, Cape Breton, 1923–2020." Born into poverty in Holland, Ella's marriage to a Canadian serviceman led to her becoming a war bride and stepmother to his three children in Cape Breton. Donovan notes that she faced discrimination as a Dutch-speaking Protestant in a Catholic community. While Ella retained some affinity for her homeland, and no doubt so did many other immigrants from Holland, the hostility of English-speaking Canadians to immigrants speaking their mother tongue clearly had an impact on decisions made by Dutch immigrants about whether or not to pass on their language to their children in Canada.

The complexities of defining a local culture are often evidenced in the efforts of the tourism industry to frame particular cultural stories that will be attractive to potential visitors. Anne-Louise Muise Semple and Del Muise provide an encouraging story of change over time for Cape Breton in this area. In "From Artifact to Living Cultures: Cape Breton's Tourism History and the Emergence of the Celtic Colours International Festival," they examine the changing strategy of Cape Breton's tourist sector, which shifted from heritage and nature to an emphasis on experiential tourism. While the focus is rather pointedly on the Gaelic and rural culture of the island with other ethnic groups and the island's urban history unrepresented in Celtic Colours, the festival does focus on a "showcasing of living cultures" that in turn provides tangible economic aid to those who want to preserve those cultures.

It's a laudable branding exercise despite all that it leaves out. Its emphasis on a particular rural culture is more authentic than some other examples in Canada of celebrations of rural life that nonetheless have in common the exclusion of urban and industrial pasts and presents. For example, white-collar Calgary, drowning in oil money, continues a long, inauthentic tradition of making the Calgary Stampede, a rural-themed event, its annual fair. The Calgary Stampede had been planned as an annual event in 1912 by an American promoter just as the ranching economy that had contributed to the city's earlier growth was receding. Its continuation for over a century demonstrates the importance to many cities of branding and commodification with no

connection to the current realities of the city.<sup>35</sup> Edmonton does one better. Its annual Klondike Exhibition perpetuates the notion that Edmonton played a major role as a supplier to gold seekers during the Klondike gold rush of the late 1890s. In fact, though its merchants hoped that their then modest prairie town would get traction from adventurers going north, other routes northward proved more popular. The gold rush had minimal impact on the development of Edmonton as a city. Only two thousand of the one hundred thousand aspiring gold seekers attempted the Edmonton route, with only a few actually reaching their destination and none reported to have found any gold.<sup>36</sup> Cape Breton's rural culture is clearly a "living culture," and it is rather the urban cultures based on coal and steel that Cape Breton festivals only provide glimpses toward with performances of the Men of the Deeps. But it is in the nature of tourism to tell only part of the story, and Cape Breton deserves credit for telling a story that reflects a revival of Gaelic life that once was suppressed on the island.

The pressures on people to speak a particular language, to fit into the dominant cultural forms that influence the spaces we call Cape Breton and Canada, and to share the same entertainments were not, in any case, always experienced as oppression. Sporting activities often served an integrative role, as John G. Reid demonstrates in his chapter, "'The Grand Old Game': The Complex History of Cricket in Cape Breton to 1914." Though cricket was clearly a settler sport, it produced a degree of settler integration across social classes. Organized sports' complex role in reducing social class tensions and racial tensions has been documented by sports historians along with its contrary role of affirming social divisions. In St. John's, teams from different vocations played baseball, the most popular sport in Canada in the late nineteenth century, against one another, and Roman Catholic teams competed with Protestant teams. But Blacks in Halifax and most everywhere else had to form their own baseball leagues before World War II because whites refused to include them in their leagues. Boxing, by contrast, was partially open to Blacks, and several Canadian champions also became important boxers in the United States. Though Indigenous people were also segregated from participating in sports organized by organizations of whites, runner Tom Longboat won the Boston Marathon in 1907.<sup>37</sup>

The racism that was prevalent in most areas of Cape Breton life, as revealed in this book's chapters, served the interests of the capitalist system that prevailed on the island and throughout Canada. The chapters in this collection

that focus on the economy and class divisions of the island speak perhaps most clearly to the reality that however unique the experiences of people in Cape Breton may appear on the surface, they are grounded in global social relations created by a particular economic structure whose reach is multinational. Don Nerbas's chapter, "Empire, Colonial Enterprise, and Speculation: Cape Breton's Coal Boom of the 1860s" is particularly pointed in its emphasis on the extent to which the opportunities or lack thereof available to people in Cape Breton have been shaped by forces beyond their control despite the facade of democratic institutions in their midst. Nerbas underlines the role of the British Empire in developing the coal industry on the island versus a more traditional focus on growing dependence on American capital and markets and a liberal economic order. London capital financed Cape Breton's coal boom in the 1860s, which collapsed during the global economic recession of the 1870s, an international event over which Cape Bretoners had no influence. That imperialist financial presence continued with the creation of the British Empire Steel Corporation, "which delivered to the Sydney coalfield another round of financial ruination."

As the editors suggest in this book's introduction, Cape Breton ended up gradually with no coal mining industry at all. Like the island's steel plant, the coal industry depended on foreign capital and foreign markets, and the profits also went abroad, leaving little room for the creation of alternative, more home-based industries through the investment of those profits locally. By the time the Nova Scotia provincial government took coal and steel under the government umbrella, it was too late for either of them to become economic.

Much of the history of capitalist development in Canada parallels the Cape Breton experience. An overdependence on the extraction of resources and their financing by foreigners or at least people outside the regions where the resources are located marks much of Canada's industrial history. External financing, external markets, and class struggles over the division of income from the resource also mark the history of the coal industry in Western Canada, particularly in the Crowsnest Pass.<sup>38</sup> In Quebec, entire communities depended on the fate of the asbestos industry, which gradually disappeared as the companies' efforts to hide the reality that the product was highly toxic became less tenable in the face of media revelations.<sup>39</sup>

The employment that was created by resource industries dependent on foreign markets frequently proved to be short term and, ultimately, resulted in a disastrous decline for many communities across Canada. At Pine Point

in the Northwest Territories, a Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company of Canada (COMINCO) lead and zinc mine that was opened in 1964 created a working-class community with good wages. But that good news story cost Canadian taxpayers about \$100 million to build infrastructure that COMINCO wasn't prepared to spend its own money on. The big losers were Indigenous people in the area, whose trapping grounds shrank because of the building of the mine and the highway that connected it to southern points as well as the increased population in the area that the workers and managers in the mine represented. They lamented, "Our traditional grounds are slowly being overtaken by these employees. There is virtually no benefit to be spoken of from the mine."<sup>40</sup> Any benefits to the employees and to Canadian taxpayers vanished in 1988 when the mine closed, leaving the disturbances to nature that it had earlier caused to linger perhaps permanently.

Even when Indigenous people were hired by a mining firm, the end of the story looked much the same. Noranda Mines began mining uranium in the area of the Anishinabek of the Serpent River First Nation in 1953. Although the First Nation had a reserve that dated back to the Robinson-Huron Treaty of 1850, Noranda bypassed the need for their permission to open a plant on reserve property to process the sulphuric acid that is a waste product of mining uranium. Instead, Noranda leased the land from a lumber mill to which the Serpent River people had provided a lease for part of the reserve's property. The Anishinabek protested, and Noranda bought their acquiescence by providing employment to many reserve residents. When the plant closed within a decade of opening, Noranda left wastes in the soil and waters nearby. The combination of the pollution from the sulphuric acid plant and the mine resulted in a huge drop in the quantity of both local fish and game. Swimming became dangerous, removing an important recreational activity.<sup>41</sup>

While the fate of settlers in coal mining areas of Cape Breton might have resembled that of the asbestos miners of Quebec more than Indigenous people in Ontario and the Northwest Territories, all of them found themselves abandoned by resource extraction companies that made their profits and moved on. Even when community activism seemed to have resulted in some concessions being made to the Mi'kmaq of Cape Breton during the more liberal era of the post-World War II period, those were largely forsaken during the neoliberal period that began in the late 1970s and has arguably persisted to the present. Neoliberalism largely rejects the modifications to marketplace economics of the earlier era in favour of a tight state-corporate partnership

that highlights the earning of profits over all other goals on the spurious grounds that economic growth is required for the creation of happy societies and that only a mollycoddling of investors and deregulation by governments can produce such growth. And so William Langford traces the history of oyster farming in “The Great Spawn: Aquaculture and Development on the Bras d’Or Lake.”

The Mi’kmaq of Eskasoni were confronted with precarious employment from the 1920s onward. They viewed oyster farming as a means of self-determination. But the few jobs it produced were seasonal. Efforts to persuade the Cape Breton Development Corporation (DEVCO) to develop the industry further faltered in the 1980s as DEVCO pulled out of development activities in favour of tax incentives and small-business loans. So oyster farming remained a marginal sector.

The neoliberal logic, which provided setbacks to Indigenous efforts to achieve self-determination, created a nationwide series of efforts by Indigenous people to demand their right to control their own lands and be exempted from the developing paradigm that removed state interventions that at least somewhat balanced monopolistic marketplace power. While they had some limited successes despite the violent reactions of state authorities, mostly their fate was similar to that of settler groups that were outside the “one percent” with all the economic and social power.<sup>42</sup> Lachlan MacKinnon’s chapter, “Industrial Crisis and the Cape Breton Coal Miners at the End of the Long Twentieth Century, 1981–86,” demonstrates that the strategy employed by the trade unions during the period of the “historic compromise” between capital and labour during the early postwar period proved useless in defending workers’ rights during the period of neoliberalism. The historic compromise in 1945 involved a three-way bargain. Capital would accept trade unions as representatives of workers in particular sectors dominated by big companies in return for labour peace: the trade unions would have to sign and then police collective agreements, suppressing any wildcat strikes that might arise, and accept owners’ and investors’ total rights to make corporate policy, including all policies that affected life on the shop floor not specifically covered in collective agreements. The trade unions would limit their defence of workers’ rights by only negotiating about wages and benefits while accepting management’s total right to manage the work process. The state would enforce collective agreements and would provide a degree of social protection for individual workers through social programs.

While many workers achieved benefits from this compromise, the trade union leadership was perhaps the most invested group within society in making the compromise permanent. For governments and industry, much of the compromise seemed to be a temporary truce necessary to deal with worker alienation from the capitalist system after sixteen years occupied by the Great Depression, World War I, and the fear of a recurrence of the postwar recession. Many elements within industry never accepted the compromise, and their forces grew in the 1960s when younger workers who had not experienced the Depression or war behaved far more incautiously than their parents in fighting corporate control over their work lives. Wildcats caused by unjust punishments of particular workers or a general disgust with speed-ups, unsafe working conditions, and negotiated wage increases that seemed insufficient in the light of corporate profits became common. Many employers regretted fiscal and social policies that focused on near-full employment because such policies made workers believe that they could find other jobs if they were fired or live without work if necessary. Relocating jobs to Third World countries where unions were illegal or had no teeth, the corporate leadership was able to persuade the leading political parties in the First World to reduce social benefits and implement monetary and fiscal policies that led to increased unemployment. The bankers referred to the “NAIRU,” the nonaccelerating inflation rate of unemployment, or in plain English, the rate of unemployment that would scare the bejesus out of workers and make strikes unlikely; tied to decreased social wages, especially from unemployment insurance, which was made far harder to qualify for, the NAIRU would discipline workers in ways that had been more common in the period before the historic compromise.<sup>43</sup>

Workers did, if with less frequency, rebel against the neoliberal order that was replacing the more liberal postwar order. MacKinnon’s chapter addresses this point as well. Faced with wage and benefits reductions in the early 1980s as neoliberalism made its still early appearance in Canada, the miners employed by DEVCO were split on how to react. Older miners were mostly content to grin and bear the Nova Scotia government’s efforts to reduce payouts to working miners. But younger miners remained resistant to management depredations and led a strike from July to October 1981. Women in the coal communities “sought solidarity across Canada, drawing comparisons between their efforts and those of the wives of striking Inco workers in Sudbury during their 1978 strike.” But the international office of the United Mine Workers of America, the union of the Cape Breton miners, had the trade

union mindset of the historic compromise period. Unable to cope with the breakdown of arrangements in which the master was willing to toss crumbs to the workers to gain their acquiescence to a system of great inequalities of wealth and power, they did not support the young strikers. Their strike fund became “moribund” while the company fought them tenaciously, secure in the knowledge that the financial masters within the union were on the side of the corporations, not their members.

There were similar circumstances outside Cape Breton. Perhaps the most reported strike during the 1980s was that of the packinghouse workers at Gainers in Alberta. Their boss, Peter Pocklington, was best known for his ownership of the Edmonton Oilers hockey team and his interventions in national progressive conservative politics. Gainers’ workers took a huge roll-back in wages in 1984 to preserve their jobs after being promised by Pocklington that they would be rewarded with a share of his profits when company sales turned around. They had turned around by 1986 when their contract terminated, but Pocklington demanded that the workers take further cuts to their wages and benefits, including their retirement pension. This time the local union, supported by virtually all the members, said no, and a seven-month labour conflict ensued. Over ten thousand people attended a rally at the provincial legislature in support of the Gainers workers, and for months, workers from other unions as well as other supporters joined the workers on their picket line. Efforts by workers to stop scabs from entering the plant led to violent confrontations with the Edmonton police, who worked on behalf of Pocklington’s interests. The local union then led a successful national campaign to boycott Gainers products; it also raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to support the strikers. But as in Cape Breton, the national leadership of the union, in this case, the United Food and Commercial Workers, was not in support of the local union. Its instincts remained to attempt to regain the good relations that existed between the companies and the meatpacking workers from 1945 to 1984.<sup>44</sup>

The presence of cautious sellouts at the top of some Canadian unions during the neoliberal era is not much of a surprise when one examines the period of the historic compromise. In the effort to fulfill their contradictory roles of representatives of the workers whom they had organized, on the one hand, and administrators of the largely proemployer rules that the employers and the state expected them to enforce, on the other, union leaders walked a fine line. They often resented the efforts of radicals to put workers’ interests ahead of the



union leaders' enforcement duties, which postwar labour legislation enshrined as the cost for treating unions as legal entities with legally enforceable collective agreements. David Frank's chapter, "C. B. Wade, Research Director and Labour Historian, 1944–50," introduces one of these labour radicals. In his role as research director of District 26 of the United Mine Workers of America, Wade mounted campaigns for labour solidarities during the 1947 coal strikes on the island. His research labelled capitalism as the cause of regional disparities. His firing as a suspected Communist in 1950 reflected the determination of more establishment labour figures to cooperate with capitalists rather than always take the side of workers in labour-capital conflicts.

Wade's background was entirely outside Cape Breton before he was hired by the UMW in 1944. Born and raised in Britain, his years in Canada before 1944 were spent as a chartered accountant and then an instructor at Queen's University. But his hiring and firing reflected contestation within a Cape Breton union that had its counterparts elsewhere in the country. Neither his hiring nor his firing can be seen as unique Cape Breton stories. Hired by District 26 when radicals were influential within the union in 1944, Wade's welcome could have occurred in many other parts of Canada because the Communists and their allies played key roles during wartime in organizing workers and preparing for combat on behalf of workers' aspirations in the postwar period.<sup>45</sup>

Similarly, Wade's firing in 1950 could have occurred anywhere else in Canada because by that point, the Cold War was a global phenomenon and certainly had a hold across the country. And so, for example, support for the Canadian Seamen's Union (CSU) during the 1930s and 1940s when it organized the seamen and extracted concessions from shipping companies on their behalf was widespread in the trade union movement before the Cold War. The CSU fought a valiant though ultimately unsuccessful battle to maintain Canada's world-class merchant fleet after the war. Neither the shippers nor the Canadian government appreciated CSU activism. The two collaborated with a company union called the Seafarers International Union (SIU) to break the CSU. The federal government allowed Hal Banks, a mobster with American convictions that made him ineligible to enter Canada, to not only enter the country but lead the SIU. That alleged union soon showed itself to be a thug puppet of the shipping companies. Only in 1964, when there was no chance that the CSU could be re-established, did the federal government take action against the leaders of the SIU. In 1950, the year Wade lost his employment with District 26, the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (TLC),

one of two competing national union centrals, stripped the CSU of its union status and disaffiliated the union. Both the TLC and the rival Congress of Canadian Labour dismissed unions led by Communists elected by their union members and carried out raids to weaken those unions. That undemocratic practice continued when the two rival organizations formed the Canadian Labour Congress in 1956.<sup>46</sup>

The strength of the chapters in this book is that they address Cape Breton issues and events with critical eyes that resist any temptation to engage in folk history and romanticization of the lives of its peoples or in the smothering of class, race, and gender differences, among others, in the name of a common Cape Breton sense of belonging. Some chapters hint at the place of the stories they are telling in contexts that go beyond the bounds of the island while others are tightly focused on local details. While this afterword tries to place all of these Cape Breton stories in national and sometimes international paradigms, it is important not to deny the importance of people's lived experiences, resistance to injustices, and successes and failures in efforts to improve their lives. As the author of a history of social policy throughout history and across the globe, I know the dangers of homogenizing human experience in particular eras and underestimating the abilities of people in particular places to win victories, temporary or long-standing, over powerful forces.<sup>47</sup> But the beauty of the chapters in this collection is that they tell local, generally bottom-up stories in unvarnished ways that make clear both the limitations under which particular groups of Cape Bretoners operated and the extent to which they fought such limitations, along with assessments of the results. That makes it rather easy to place these stories in larger national and international contexts.

## Notes

1. Marx, *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 5.
2. Upton, *Micmacs and Colonists*; Parnaby, "Cultural Economy of Survival," 69–98.
3. Early estimates of precontact Mi'kmaq numbers were based on counts made after smallpox and other European-imported diseases had decimated a large percentage of the Mi'kmaq population. Taking mortality rates into account and the accounts of Indigenous people reported to early Jesuit missionaries, anthropologist Virginia P. Miller estimated that there must have been thirty-five thousand to seventy thousand people in Mi'kma'ki

before contact with Europeans. The entire Mi'kmaw population by 1850 has been estimated at about thirty-five hundred. So the numbers of Mi'kmaw in Cape Breton, which had formed one of seven districts of Mi'kma'ki in the precontact period, may have been between five thousand and ten thousand before Europeans arrived in their midst. Miller, "Aboriginal Micmac Population," 117–27. It should be noted that while new diseases can help explain an initial decline in an Indigenous population, they are rarely the whole story. Populations spring back after a plague if socio-economic conditions are favourable. A focus on social determinants of health rather than on the deadly character of particular viruses demonstrates why Indigenous populations in Canada and elsewhere failed to recover to precontact numbers for many generations. Waldram, Herring, and Young, *Aboriginal Health in Canada*.

4. Parnaby, "Cultural Economy of Survival," 73.
5. Miller, Ruru, Behrendt, and Lindberg, *Discovering Indigenous Lands*.
6. Smith, *Sacred Feathers*.
7. Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics*; Lutz, *Makúk*.
8. Wicken, *Colonization of Mi'kmaw*.
9. Donald, "Edmonton Pentimento," 21–53.
10. Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains*.
11. Edmonds, "Unpacking Settler Colonialism's Urban Strategies," 4–20.
12. Barman, "Erasing Indigenous Indigeneity in Vancouver," 3–30; Stanger-Ross, "Municipal Colonialism," 541–80; Loo, *Moved by the State*.
13. Martin and Hoffman, *Power Struggles*; Waldram, *As Long as the Rivers Run*.
14. Murchadha, *Great Famine*; Burke, *People and the Poor Law*; Gallagher, *Paddy's Lament*.
15. Fowke, *National Policy and the Wheat Economy*, 285.
16. Ahaja, "State Formation," 352.
17. Frankopian, *Silk Roads*, 268–70.
18. Ahaja, "State Formation," 352–79.
19. Walker, *Black Loyalists*.
20. Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.
21. Kilian, *Go Do Some Great Thing*.
22. Shepherd, "Diplomatic Racism," 5–16.
23. Clairmont and Magill, *Africville*; Chong, *Concubine's Children*.
24. Calliste, "Influence of Civil Rights," 123–39.
25. *Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism*, vol. 2, *Education* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1968), 115–16.
26. *1971 Census of Canada: Language by Age Groups* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1974).

27. *Report of the Royal Commission*, 116–23.
28. *1971 Census of Canada*.
29. Fédération des Francophones hors Québec, *Heirs of Lord Durham*.
30. Castonguay, “Mesure de l’assimilation linguistique au moyen des recensements,” 45. Translation of the quotation from French by Alvin Finkel.
31. Lepage, “Linguistic Diversity,” <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016010/98-200-x2016010-eng.cfm>.
32. Lepage.
33. Lepage.
34. Swyripa, *Storied Landscapes*; Petryshyn, *Peasants in the Promised Land*.
35. Foran, *Icon, Brand, Myth*.
36. Bennett, *Yukon Transportation*.
37. Kidd, *Struggle for Canadian Sport*.
38. Langford and Frazer, “Cold War and Working Class Politics,” 43–81; Seager, “Proletariat in Wild Rose Country.”
39. van Horssen, *Town Called Asbestos*.
40. Testimony by Mike Beaulieu of Fort Resolution to the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline inquiry in Berger, *Northern Frontier, Northern Homeland*, 1:123.
41. Leddy, “Interviewing Nookomis and Other Reflections,” 1–18.
42. Barker, “Direct Act of Resurgence,” 43–65; Temper, “Blocking Pipelines,” 94–112; Nickel, *Assembling Unity*.
43. Panitch and Gindin, *Making of Global Capitalism*; Jackson, “NAIRU and Macro-economic Policy in Canada.”
44. May, *Battle of 66 Street*; Noël and Gardner, “Gainers’ Strike,” 31–72.
45. McInnis, *Harnessing Labour Confrontation*.
46. Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour*.
47. Finkel, *Compassion*.

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**David Frank** is a professor emeritus in the Department of History at the University of New Brunswick. His research focuses on working-class and labour history in Atlantic Canada and social biography. He is widely known for his award-winning biography of labour leader J. B. McLachlan, which is considered a classic work of Canadian social history. One of his major books, *Provincial Solidarities*, covers a full century of working-class history in New Brunswick and was published in both English and French editions. He has coauthored or edited ten other books and published more than a hundred journal articles, book chapters, and reference essays. He has also played a leading role in the promotion of Atlantic regional history.

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**Don Nerbas** is an associate professor and the St. Andrew's Society / McEuen Scholarship Foundation chair in Canadian-Scottish studies. He is also a member of the Montreal History Group / Groupe d'histoire de Montréal. His work centres on the history of capitalism, particularly its social, political, and cultural dimensions, and he has published widely on the politics of business and the political economy of capitalism in Canada. His current research centres on Cape Breton's coal trade and the social and political history of

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**Andrew Parnaby** is an associate professor of history and dean of the School of Arts and Social Sciences at Cape Breton University. The author of several books, articles, and reviews in labour, working-class, and political history, he serves on the editorial boards of *Labour/Le Travail* and the *Canadian Historical Review*.

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**Martha Walls** is an associate professor of history at Mount Saint Vincent University. Her research area lies in Atlantic Canadian First Nations history, with a specialization in the historical experiences of twentieth-century First Nations women. Her book, *No Need of a Chief for This Band: The Maritime Mi'kmaq and Federal Electoral Legislation, 1899–1951*, was published by the University of British Columbia Press in 2010. Her work has also appeared in *Acadiensis*, the *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, and the *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*. Walls is currently working on a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council–funded study of the Micmac Community Development Program and studies that examine the experiences of female Aboriginal day school teachers and the role gender played in the disestablishment of the New Germany Mi'kmaq reserve in Nova Scotia.