

Re-Connecting with the History of Labour in New Brunswick:  
Historical Perspectives on Contemporary Issues / Nouveau regard sur  
l'histoire du travail au Nouveau-Brunswick :  
Les enjeux contemporains vus dans une perspective historique

“RE-CONNECTING WITH THE HISTORY OF LABOUR in New Brunswick: Historical Perspectives on Contemporary Issues / Nouveau regard sur l'histoire du travail au Nouveau-Brunswick : Les enjeux contemporains vus dans une perspective historique” (LHTNB) is a programme of research, study, and activity placing the contemporary challenges facing New Brunswick workers in historical perspective. The project grew out of shared concerns among academic researchers, heritage institutions, and labour unions for greater attention to the contributions of working people and labour unions in the province's development during the last century. Support was secured from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) under the Community-University Research Alliances programme (CURA) for a five-year project that officially began in 2005 and will end in 2010.

The mandate of the CURA programme is “to support the creation of community-university alliances which, through a process of ongoing collaboration and mutual learning, foster innovative research, training, and the creation of new knowledge in areas of importance for the social, cultural or economic development of Canadian communities.”<sup>1</sup> In the case of LHTNB, the alliance or partnership draws together the leading practitioners of labour history in New Brunswick, located at two provincial universities, as well as three major public institutions dedicated to heritage collection, the professional associations of both French- and English-language teachers, and several of the largest and most influential labour organizations in the province. The partners in the project are the University of New Brunswick and l'Université de Moncton, the New Brunswick Federation of Labour, the Canadian Labour Congress, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the New Brunswick Nurses' Union, the New Brunswick Union, the Nurses Association of New Brunswick, l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants francophones du Nouveau-Brunswick, the New Brunswick Teachers' Association, le Centre d'études acadiennes, the Heritage Branch of the Province of New Brunswick, the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick, and the New Brunswick Museum.

\* The three parts of this forum were presentations made at a session of the Atlantic Canada Studies Conference – “University-Community Collaborations” – at Saint Mary's University on 6 May 2007 (and subsequently revised).

1 See CURA URL located at [http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/web/apply/program\\_descriptions/cura\\_e.asp](http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/web/apply/program_descriptions/cura_e.asp). The goals of the project are outlined in David Frank, “Re-Connecting with History: A Community-University Research Alliance on the History of Labor in New Brunswick,” *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas*, 3, 1 (Spring 2006), pp. 49-57.

Carol Ferguson, “Re-Connecting with the History of Labour in New Brunswick: Historical Perspectives on Contemporary Issues / Nouveau regard sur l'histoire du travail au Nouveau-Brunswick : Les enjeux contemporains vus dans une perspective historique,” *Acadiensis*, XXXVII, 1 (Winter/Spring 2008), pp. 76-85.

The LHTNB research team includes seven scholars, six based at the two universities and one from the community partners. The members of the research team are as follows: David Frank, principal investigator and professor of history at the University of New Brunswick; Greg Kealey, professor of history and vice-president (research) at the University of New Brunswick; Linda Kealey, professor of history at the University of New Brunswick; Nicole Lang, professor of history at l'Université de Moncton, Edmundston campus; Raymond Léger, research representative for the Canadian Union of Public Employees in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island; Nelson Ouellet, associate professor of history at l'Université de Moncton, Moncton campus; and Bill Parenteau, associate professor of history at the University of New Brunswick. Support for the activities of the project is provided by project officers Denise Paquette and Carol Ferguson working at project offices on the university campuses in Moncton and Fredericton.

LHTNB is a provincial project in the geographic scope of its interests and its activities. It is also a bilingual project. The research team interacts in both languages, community partners work in both languages, student training and research assistantships occur at both universities (on three campuses – Moncton, Fredericton, and Edmundston), and the research outcomes of the project are presented in English and French.

The project is organized around five major research areas reflecting the shared interests and concerns of the academic researchers, the heritage institutions, the professional associations, and the labour organization partners. The five thematic areas are as follows:

- 1) "Provincial Solidarities" is directed at creating a more adequate understanding of the historical record of unions in the province in representing members and influencing public policy.
- 2) "Le travail en Acadie" focuses on increasing the understanding of the economic contributions and working lives of Acadians.
- 3) "Contested Territory: Transformation of the Woods" seeks to provide a more complete understanding of the participation of New Brunswickers in the forest economy of the 20th century.
- 4) "Women's Work: Focus on Caring" examines the expansion of women's work in the 20th century through a focus on the history of nursing in the province.
- 5) "Labour Landmarks" aims at identifying, documenting, and bringing increased visibility to those labour landmarks that currently exist within the provincial landscape.

Findings in these five theme areas contribute to the larger research goals of the project, which are to both identify the changes in the working lives of New Brunswickers over the past several generations and to examine the role of labour movements at all levels of provincial society in contributing to the process of social change. The research programme thus incorporates both the social history and institutional approaches to labour history that have been common in recent decades.

Given that five papers have been presented at this Atlantic Canada Studies Conference in Halifax from members of the project's research team, I am not going to report further on the research results except to mention that research is also being

contributed to the project by LHTNB graduate fellowship holders, graduate and undergraduate research assistants, and “friends” of the project (a term covering a diverse range of individuals including retirees and local community historians).<sup>2</sup> But what I want to do is report on the progress of three other aspects of the CURA project that are entirely additional to the research results:

- 1) partnership relationships
- 2) education and training
- 3) knowledge mobilization

### **Partnership relationships**

Partnerships are becoming a key part of almost all research-funding protocols. Increasingly, one must have a “partner” to receive funding for research. In the Canadian context this has generally meant, until quite recently, collaboration by researchers with private sector corporations. These university-private sector partnerships within the natural sciences, engineering, technology, and business schools have been actively promoted and practised by government and the private sector for a number of years.

University partnerships with community-based organizations in the voluntary sector are a recent development in Canada outside of Quebec, although such partnerships have a long tradition in Europe and in the United States.<sup>3</sup> These research partnerships are driven by factors other than financial profit and may include preferences for community-based learning, collaborative research, and community service or such goals as increasing community capacity for decision-making and generating greater social capital. The Canadian CURA programme – launched in 1999 and re-worked for 2003 – draws on those experiences. Since the CURA programme was launched in 1998, SSHRC has funded 92 research projects and has awarded a total amount of \$84,335,236.<sup>4</sup> In the transformation of SSHRC from a “granting council to knowledge council” the CURA programme has emerged as a key element of its core programme architecture.

2 LHTNB research team members presented the following papers to the Atlantic Canada Studies Conference, Saint Mary’s University in Halifax on 3-6 May 2007: Linda Kealey, “No More ‘Yes Girls’: Labour Activism among New Brunswick Nurses, 1964-1981”; Bill Parenteau, “Testing the Limits: Woods Work, the Minimum Wage and Industrial Relations in New Brunswick, 1930-1941”; Nicole Lang, “La crise dans l’industrie forestière: Les défis pour la communauté et les travailleurs du Nord-Ouest”; David Frank, “The New Brunswick Labour Landmark: A Reconnaissance”; and Nelson Ouellet, “L’émigration aux États-Unis et l’activisme ouvrier en Acadie (1887-1949).”

3 For discussions on collaborative and community-based research see the following: Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, “Large-Scale Research Projects and the Humanities: A Report,” June 2006 (<http://www.fedcan.ca/english/pdf/publications/HumanitiesReportFinalEng.pdf>); Lawrence F. Felt, Penelope M. Rowe, and Kenneth Curlew, “Teaching Academic Dogs and Cats New Tricks: ‘Re-Tooling’ Senior Academic Researchers for Collaborative Community-based Research” (paper presented at Researching the Voluntary Sector conference, Sheffield, England, 1-2 September 2004 and found at <http://www.envision.ca/pdf/cura/DogsCats.pdf>); and Jill Chopyak and Peter N. Levesque, “Community-Based Research and Changes in the Research Landscape,” *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, 22, 3 (June 2002), pp. 203-9.

4 Julia Gualtieri, “Re: CURA Question,” e-mail to Carol Ferguson, 31 October 2007.

Historians are only one group of researchers adapting their work to the CURA model. The range of research questions being explored by CURA projects is wide (including the preservation of the Innu language, the housing needs of an aging population, and community mental health services) and the range of community partners equally varied (including First Nations chiefs and councils, theatre troupes, seniors groups, environmental groups, and local museums).

It is the project partners who jointly define a CURA's research goals as well as the participatory arrangements under which individual researchers and research teams will carry out those activities. To develop this CURA proposal, research team members met individually or in sub-groups with all of the partners and consulted in detail on the programme and the participation for each partner. One major undertaking was the organization of a New Brunswick labour history workshop at the University of New Brunswick on 10 June 2004, which gathered together all research team members and more than 25 invited guests representing prospective partners and interested graduate students. Interventions were in both languages and simultaneous translation was provided. The workshop included a round table exploring the objectives of the programme as well as the activities of common interest. A keynote address was given by Professor James Green from the College of Public and Community Service, University of Massachusetts, Boston, who discussed his work in public history initiatives over the last 30 years with particular attention to the role of partnerships in undertaking activities in oral history, commemorations, and history workshops.

In defining the basis of a partnership, the researchers, labour organizations, and heritage institutions who came together as LHTNB agreed that they shared interests in the preservation of records, the collection of veteran members' memories, training sessions, and the dissemination of historical information and resources to their membership, students, and the public. The labour organizations were especially pleased with the collaboration of the heritage institutions as their participation signaled more recognition within the province of labour history and the history of work. In the CURA grant application, letters from the heritage institutions and labour organizations indicated their commitment to the partnership and articulated their expectations and obligations more concretely. Among the needs expressed by labour partners was assistance to catalogue a collection of documents, the development of training materials for staff and members, the making of presentations at annual meetings, the interviewing of veteran members, and the writing of a brief history of their union. Heritage institutions asked for assistance from other project partners to increase their holdings in archival and artifact collections relating to work and labour organizations. In return, community partners committed to arrange access to their members for researchers, allow access to records, share expertise, promote the project, encourage participation in the research, permit the use of offices, staff time, and expertise, assist in the dissemination of results, and provide curatorial and design resources for the production of an exhibition.

This project's collaboration with three community partners – the New Brunswick Federation of Labour (NBFL), the Nurses Association of New Brunswick (NANB), and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) – are examples of how the project is working in interesting ways. The research programme for the New Brunswick Federation of Labour, for instance, was developed in full collaboration

with the chair of the federation's Education Committee. The history of the NBFL, one of the first federations of labour in Canada, is an important narrative line in tracing the structure and evolution of an organized labour movement in New Brunswick from the early 20th century to the present. The NBFL story reveals the emergence and consolidation of labour bodies, the organization of various local private and public sector unions, the presence of francophones and women in the house of labour, the origins and evolution of public policy around employment standards, workers' compensation, the minimum wage, human rights, and equal pay and pay equity provisions. A key commitment made by the NBFL was to complete the transfer of its records to the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick (PANB). When long-time NBFL Executive Director John Murphy prepared to retire, he boxed federation materials and his own papers in consultation with myself and archives staff for deposit at the PANB. On 2 September 2005, 144 boxes of archival materials were moved from the NBFL offices in Moncton to safe-keeping in the climate-controlled PANB vault in Fredericton. It was truly a partnership effort with John Murphy, Provincial Archivist Marion Beyea, archivist Twila Buttimer and LHTNB project director David Frank all lending a hand with the move that day. A year later, the project facilitated the transfer of additional archival materials from outgoing NBFL Executive Assistant Jean-Marie Nadeau to the collection at the PANB. On 23 November 2006, I traveled to Moncton with Fred Farrell, the manager of Private Sector Records, PANB, to meet with Jean-Marie Nadeau and take possession of his papers. With these deposits, the PANB now holds a significant collection of NBFL materials including executive minutes, annual proceedings, correspondence and briefs, photographs, and publications that will be important for research in provincial labour history for many years to come.

To further organize the NBFL collection and prepare it for use by researchers, the project placed two student research assistants at the PANB under the supervision of archives staff. At this stage some gaps were identified in the collection of annual reports and proceedings. Hopeful that copies of most of these missing documents had survived in local union offices or in the homes of past and present federation members, a successful appeal was launched on our website and to retired labour activists for assistance to complete the collection. As a result of donations from individual union members and union locals, original reports have now been located for all of the annual meetings except 1913, 1916, and 1917.

Using this newly available historical documentation, the research team began compiling a list of the presidents of the NBFL and their terms of office. A series of biographical features is currently in preparation that explains the life and times of each of the 16 different people who have occupied the position of president of the NBFL from its creation in 1913 to the present. The features include a biographical essay as well as illustrations, documents, and suggestions for more sources. These features will help to introduce the history of the New Brunswick Federation of Labour over the past century to union activists, students, and scholars.

The Nurses Association of New Brunswick is also a community partner that held a significant collection of historical materials. Since 1992, the NANB building in Fredericton has housed the Nursing History Resource Centre, which contains numerous historical documents, photographs, audio and video materials, artifacts, and books. When the centre's archivist and founder Arlee Hoyt McGee died in 2003, questions of how best to preserve the collection and maintain access emerged. Among

the LHTNB partnership commitments was one to assist the NANB to conserve and organize the centre's materials for research. LHTNB secured a professional archivist to work with summer assistants to prepare 100 boxes of documents and an accompanying finding aid in the summer of 2005. Later, shelf lists were created for more than 3,000 photos and the audiovisual materials. With this completed, research team member Linda Kealey and a student assistant were able to begin using the collection for research.

Copies of the finding aid, shelf lists, and a report prepared by the archivist on the document collection were presented by LHTNB to the executive of the NANB. In its deliberations on the future of the Nursing History Resource Centre, the NANB executive sought the expertise of project researchers working on the nursing history theme. Project researchers, in turn, worked with archivists at the PANB to prepare a presentation to the executive of the NANB on best practices for document conservation. Another project partner, the New Brunswick Museum (NBM), provided the services of a curator to inventory and report on the centre's artifacts. As a result of subsequent negotiations with the New Brunswick Museum, the nursing history collection was moved to the museum in Saint John, thus assuring its preservation in an appropriate facility and continued access for researchers in the field. This collection, assembled by Arlee Hoyt McGee, will be a key resource for a museum exhibit on nursing history being organized as part of the project's activities.

In addition to the commitments made by the partners as part of the application for CURA funding, the activities around the NBFL and NANB collections being just two examples, the project partnerships have also led to unanticipated opportunities for collaboration. When CUPE Local 2464 looked for assistance to mark its 25th anniversary, CUPE regional staff asked the project to become involved. The local, which represents workers at the Mill Cove Nursing Home, had achieved its first collective agreement only after a strike that lasted more than 12 months and is well-remembered in provincial labour history. It was this story that veteran members of the local hoped to pass on to younger union members. The project agreed to help them do this. From documents, scrapbooks, and photos loaned by members of the local, a student assistant created a chronology of events that formed the basis of a presentation by research team member Raymond Léger at the celebration. Student assistants also created a display of photographs and documents for the occasion and they and I participated in the evening's events on 27 May 2006 at the Jemseg Lions Club. We used the opportunity to record speeches recalling the organization of the union and approached workers to participate in the oral history component of the project. These materials were then developed by a student associated with the project as presentations to our community partners and at the 8th Annual University of Maine-University of New Brunswick Graduate Student History Conference from the 20 to 22 October 2006.

### **Training and education**

A second important objective for CURA research projects is to enhance the education and employability of students by providing opportunities for hands-on research and related experience. With CURA funding, the project has employed student research assistants for full-time work during the summer months and as part-time research assistants through the fall and winter terms. The project has also successfully



leveraged additional support for students through government and university student employment programmes. Student assistants contribute directly to the research results of the project while developing their archival, online, and library research skills.

Placing students in partner institutions has been one way of providing them with professional skills and workplace experiences of lasting value. Placements in partner institutions have both contributed to students' sense of belonging in the project and enhanced the partner relationships. For community and heritage partners, for instance, a student placement is a very tangible connection with the day-to-day work of the project. And for community partners in particular, student placements help bridge the distance between the academic and community worlds. Students placed at the PANB and NANB to organize document collections received training in archival skills as well as work experience with professional staff. At the offices of the New Brunswick Union in Fredericton, to take but one example, two student assistants worked eight weeks to compile an inventory of records and prepare research reports on the institutional history of the union. The training and work experience in a professional environment that student assistants gained through their involvement in the project were valued highly in their own evaluations of their work and through informal feedback. Such placements can also create lasting professional connections and future employment opportunities.

Student assistants have represented the project in the community. When the 100th anniversary of the Chestnut Canoe Company was celebrated at the annual Fredericton River Festival in June 2005, the project partnered with the PANB and set up a booth in Officers' Square in downtown Fredericton one Saturday. Our display of historical documents and photographs was designed to locate men and women who had worked building the famous Chestnut canoes. Student assistants constructed booth displays, answered questions, handed out information sheets on the project, and signed up former employees of the Chestnut Canoe factory for oral interviews.

Through the project's labour history workshops, students are part of the collaboration with community partners in public events. Events have already been held in Saint John, Minto, Edmundston, and Boiestown, with additional workshops planned. In Minto, for example, the CURA project and the Minto Public Library sponsored a Minto Labour History Workshop on 28 July 2005 as part of the project's work on labour landmarks. David Frank gave a talk about the mine shaft disaster that occurred on 28 July 1932 and asked those attending to help tell the story of the plaque erected by the community to commemorate that event. The mayor, town councilors, United Mine Workers of America Local 7409 executive members, and members of the public attended, including the daughter of one of the men who died in the disaster. CURA summer students who assisted in the research on Minto were on hand at the workshop to sign up those in attendance for oral interviews and these were carried out at a later date.

Research assignments have also taken students to communities throughout the province and placed them in contact with a wide range of people. This was certainly true for a student assistant who spent a summer researching firefighters' memorials for the Labour Landmarks theme. The student met with union members of the International Association of Firefighters, veteran firefighters, elected municipal officials, professional and volunteer museum staff, and local historians while searching out information.

Oral history is another area of skills training for LHTNB student assistants. The

project includes a significant oral history component in its research methods and partner commitments. Our community partners have taken the lead in identifying individuals to be interviewed and encouraging them to assist the work of the project in this way. Both student assistants and research team members benefited from a full-day training session on doing oral history presented by staff at one of our partner institutions – the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick. A substantial portion of the project’s more than 90 oral interviews with labour activists, nurses, and other workers have been carried out by student assistants. Additionally, students have had hands-on experience in the transcription and editing of oral interviews as they prepared these for deposit with our heritage institution partners.

Students involved with the project have also had participatory experiences to help develop their research-presentation skills. Research reports are given by students and the research team at the yearly LHTNB meeting with community and heritage partners. Project support has enabled student assistants to present papers at academic conferences such as the annual University of Maine-University of New Brunswick Graduate Student History Conference and the annual conference of the Institut d’histoire de l’Amérique française. Students have also had the benefit of attending presentations by senior international scholars in the field of labour history who were brought to New Brunswick by the project. In November 2006, for instance, Seth Wigderson, the founder and moderator of H-Labor, the on-line labour history discussion list that fosters international academic discussion of labour history subjects, gave a seminar to students and faculty associated with the project. Students are also preparing web materials for the LHTNB web site, which is helping to increase their digital-media skills.

Graduate fellowships in the history of labour in 20th-century New Brunswick are another way in which the project enhances educational opportunities for students. One doctoral fellowship and four master’s fellowships have been awarded to date. Three master’s theses and one doctoral dissertation have now been completed in connection with the project, and an additional eight are in progress as well as one honours thesis. For the academic terms beginning in 2008, we expect to award two master’s fellowships valued at \$12,500 per annum and one doctoral fellowship valued at \$15,000 per annum. As graduate fellows and research assistants, students are, of course, also benefiting from mentoring and supervision by academic and community researchers.

### **Knowledge mobilization**

The project is actively employing the traditional methods of disseminating research results to academic audiences, including conference presentations, reports, papers, journal articles, course materials, and books. For dissemination to non-academic audiences, the means include a website, newspapers, radio and television, community meetings, workshops, pamphlets, exhibits in addition to books, and presentations in more popular forums.

Our bilingual website – <http://www.lhtnb.ca> – is a major project initiative that serves as a site for research dissemination and also as a tool for the work of the project through its interactive functions such as the blog and feedback forms. We used the blog, for example, to invite colleagues and friends of the late John Francis “Lofty” MacMillan (1917-2006), the New Brunswick labour leader who became one of



Canada's most important union organizers, to share their stories and memories about one of the giants in New Brunswick and Canadian labour history.

The labour history workshops that have been conducted are effective public forums to bring academics and community leaders together. A labour history workshop on the crisis in the forest industries sponsored in collaboration with the Edmundston campus of l'Université de Moncton was held at the Musée historique du Madawaska on 7 June 2006. Paul-André Lapointe, director of the Department of Industrial Relations at l'Université Laval, gave a presentation on strategies adopted by local communities facing similar crises in Québec since the 1970s and Michel Soucy, a researcher in the Faculty of Forestry at the Edmundston campus, examined the causes of the present crisis in the industry. The current situation was placed in the context of the history of the Madawaska region by research team member Nicole Lang, who also served as organizer for the well-attended event. Among those attending were past and present members of local forest industry unions.

The project team also returns to communities that have been sites of research to share the research results. The launch of *War on the Home Front: The Farm Diaries of Daniel MacMillan, 1914-1927* (Fredericton: Goose Lane Editions, 2006) took place at the United Church in Williamsburg and the Old Dance Hall at the Stanley Fairgrounds on Saturday 13 May 2006. The book, a portrait of life and work in rural York County, was prepared by team member Bill Parenteau in collaboration with Stephen Dutcher, managing editor of the journal *Acadiensis*. The day's events featured a presentation by the editors and a reception attended by about 80 people. *War on the Home Front* was also featured on a widely seen New Brunswick cable television programme. The project plans to return to Minto for a public presentation of David Frank's just-published article "Minto 1932: The Origins and Significance of a New Brunswick Labour Landmark" and to provide a number of coil-bound copies of this article for use by the Minto Village Council, the Minto Museum, the Minto Public Library, and local schools.<sup>5</sup>

Preparing research results for publications that appeal to members of our community partners is another way to raise awareness of the history of work and labour organizations in the province. *The Struggle against Wage Controls: The Saint John Story, 1975-1976* (St. John's, NL: Canadian Committee on Labour History, 2006) by George Vair is a personal account by a veteran Saint John labour activist of how workers in one New Brunswick industrial community mobilized to defend their unions and defeat the wage controls imposed by Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau. The book is written in a way that will appeal to union members as well as students of labour history and is the result of collaboration between the project and George Vair. At the launch of the book a large and diverse audience was in attendance at the New Brunswick Museum for an evening of discussion that included a presentation by former Canadian Labour Congress president Bob White. In addition, research team members contribute, as part of our dissemination activities, to popular magazines such as *Our Times: Canada's Independent Labour Magazine* and *Revue de la Société historique du Madawaska* as well as the membership publications of our partners.

5 David Frank, "Minto 1932: The Origins and Significance of a New Brunswick Labour Landmark," *Acadiensis*, XXXVI, 2 (Spring 2007), pp. 3-27.

**Conclusion**

At the end of year two, LHTNB has significant progress to report. The project has had major success in assembling resources for historical research and facilitating their deposit within heritage institutions. A substantial number of work opportunities have been provided to students as well as training in professional skills and community workplace experiences. Public educational activities and scholarly outcomes have been considerable. These concrete accomplishments continue to strengthen the university-community partnerships that have been established and further the shared goal of enriching the public memory of the experience of work in the province of New Brunswick.

CAROL FERGUSON



From left: David Frank, George Vair, and Bob White at the launch of *The Struggle against Wage Controls: The Saint John Story, 1975-1976* at the New Brunswick Museum, Market Square, Saint John, on 28 February 2007. The sculpture to the right is *People Waiting* by John Hooper.