

## Editorial Introduction: New Brunswick at a Critical Crossroads

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the *Journal of New Brunswick Studies/Revue d'études sur le Nouveau-Brunswick (JNBS/RÉNB)*.

It has become customary in Canada for the first issues of new journals and magazines to be accompanied by stirring manifestos that rally editorial troops to action and invite readers to imagine brave new worlds in pages of *avant-garde* writing. Perhaps because *JNBS/RÉNB* is a New Brunswick journal, however, a more measured greeting seems wiser—but not because the conservatism of our two settler cultures still informs our provincial ethos. Rather, small steps seem warranted in a province that has not expended much intellectual capital or ink on understanding itself. This has been an especially serious problem in English New Brunswick.

A quick look at the facts will illustrate the point: no contemporary history of the province exists, no provincial encyclopedia, no talk radio, no independent press, no publishing house large or bold enough to represent the province, and almost no historical fiction or documentary film, the genres that best accommodate the examination of identities, contacts, and cultural differences.

Is that lack of resources attributable to a paucity of funds or a hinterland status? Likely neither. *BC Studies* and *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* are journals dedicated to exploring the cultural, economic, and political dimensions of their provinces, regardless of their distance from the centre of the country. Alberta and Nova Scotia have numerous histories that speak to both specialist and general readers. Quebec and Nunavut have thriving film and documentary industries, Nunavut's recent phenomenon attributable to low-cost digital video. And lastly, the *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, the *Encyclopedia of Manitoba*, the *Dictionary of Prince Edward Island English*, *The Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan*, and *The Encyclopedia of British Columbia* are reference tools that enable close study of each province.

Why are those resources and the commons they make available for public engagement necessary? Because they enable citizens, wrote New Brunswick's A.G. Bailey, "to discover their own place among the nations," thereby differentiating their identity from that of others. As a pioneering cultural worker in New Brunswick, Bailey knew that identity—what people think about themselves and tell others—is *produced* in story and history, a fact that elevates dialogue and debate to the status of society's most important labours.

Bailey's understanding of the use of media for the production of identity seems especially suited to an era of post-nationalism, an era when "information" about elsewhere serves increasingly to disenfranchise, telling us nothing about our make-up at the crossroads of religion, geography, ethnicity, class, and, most important in New Brunswick, language. What we know today, said Hugh Kenner, we know only of elsewhere, a statement that is particularly suited to New Brunswick.

The absence of histories, journals, films, publishing houses, and other independent media for introspective and intellectual engagement in New Brunswick means that we don't know ourselves as a people; and because we don't know ourselves, we must settle for what others say about us. That defeatism, backwardness, and intransigence continue to define our identity is a function of the fact that special interests in and out of the province have popularized some histories over others, an action that has been mostly uncontested in English New Brunswick.

*JNBS/RÉNB* was founded to counter that tendency. Growing out of the SSHRC-funded New Brunswick and Atlantic Studies Research and Development Centre, the journal aims to create a public commons for the exchange of ideas about the province and its place in wider national and global contexts. This is the first issue in what we hope will become a rich repository of critical writing that engages a wide readership in an ongoing conversation about the province.

The only such journal of its kind in New Brunswick, *JNBS/RÉNB* is multidisciplinary, digital, and open access: multidisciplinary to accommodate the wide range of disciplinary perspectives needed in the province, and digital to provide open access to its content on the principle that making research freely available to the public supports a greater global exchange of knowledge.

We publish both peer-reviewed articles and invited essays, and in the official language in which they come to us. While not completely bilingual, we have committed ourselves to creating a journal that reflects and accommodates the rich

pluralities of a bilingual province. Our long-term goal is to publish an equal number of French and English essays/articles in each issue.

The current issue features essays on historical knowledge, spatial identity, political economy, and the free (and not-so-free) New Brunswick press. As well, peer-reviewed articles cover topics as diverse as urban development, linguistic identity, federalism, gender equity, and immigration. In sum, many of the province's leading scholars are represented.

In recent events, New Brunswick citizens have shown an unprecedented desire to become involved in provincial matters. In many ways, *JNBS/RÉNB* reflects the same desire, opening channels of discourse between scholars and citizens so that both may come "to discover their own place among the nations." Our ultimate goal is to provide a forum for ideas, approaches, and interpretations that result in a better province for all citizens.

On behalf of the editorial and advisory boards, I would like to welcome you to the journal and invite your participation as we move forward.

To query article ideas or learn more about *JNBS/RÉNB*, please contact the editor at [editor.jnbs@stu.ca](mailto:editor.jnbs@stu.ca) or visit our website at <http://w3.stu.ca/stu/sites/jnbs/index.html>.

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