

Introduction

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This is the second of two special issues of the *Journal of New Brunswick Studies* that features the work of researchers associated with Mount Allison University, as part of a grant awarded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada through its Aid to Small Universities Program. The first special issue, edited by Lauren Beck and Christina Ionescu (issue 6(1), 2015), provided a detailed introduction to the challenges and opportunities faced by small communities in New Brunswick. The articles in this second special issue build on that theme by bringing together another diverse and interdisciplinary group of scholars to focus on the theme of “Small Communities in the Twenty-First Century: Understanding the Role of Identity and Representation in Reflecting and Shaping the Livability of Maritime Communities” (2011–14). The Aid to Small Universities Program affords opportunities for the university, faculty, students, and the community to work together and build toward more “livable communities” in the region. As a small community, Sackville derives significant benefit from Mount Allison, not only as a major employer, but also through the possibilities for knowledge mobilization and community engagement for faculty and students. The articles in this special issue illustrate many of the research connections made with Mount Allison faculty, as well as research networks across universities that place an emphasis on community engagement. We examine some of the challenges that small communities have encountered in their development as well as some of the challenges that are on the horizon regarding livability and the potential for stability and growth.

In Paul Bogaard’s essay, “The First Frame House in Sackville Parish,” the author uncovers the interesting history related to early development in Sackville by dating and tracing the construction of what is now the Boultenhouse Heritage Centre. The article nicely blends two investigatory approaches to better understand the origins of early family settlement in the region. In tandem with an investigation of municipal registries, Bogaard uses dendrochronology to date the timbers of the Boultenhouse structure and arrive at an accurate date of construction. Through his investigation we can see how the history of a house intertwines with the history of the province as names, dates, and places that help us understand the construction of the house also give us a better understanding of the region’s settlement and development. Bogaard, as a retired Mount Allison professor and long-time member of the Tantramar Heritage Trust, is a true example of how the university and the community engage in historical and cultural research, using scientific methods to mark these structural points in time.

Lauren Beck’s article, “Early-Modern European and Indigenous Linguistic Influences on New Brunswick Place Names,” traces the origin of place names. Like Bogaard, Beck establishes a strong understanding of the many practices that go toward naming New Brunswick’s communities. Her article specifically examines early maps and travel narratives to trace the development of place names in New Brunswick. A toponymic study, Beck sheds light on the colonial practices of territorial claims and place naming as part of the development of New Brunswick. Not only were these practices able to define modern settlements in terms of place and space, the naming of place through European colonizing practices illustrates part of the multifaceted practices associated with territorial conquest and control. Although much of the Indigenous influence is still visible in this province regarding place names, Beck points out in great detail that the European transformation of these names carries with it many of the colonizing practices embedded in New Brunswick’s history.

In “The Extraordinary Employment Tenure of New Brunswick Municipal Officers: A Case of the Entrenched Civil Servant?”, Geoff Martin examines the employment and tenure practices of municipal officers as part of the judicial, political, and bureaucratic history of New Brunswick. Noting the “extraordinary” tenure of municipal officers, Martin highlights the strong role that municipal governments have played in the development of the social fabric of New Brunswick communities. Together, the articles by Bogaard, Beck, and Martin provide an interdisciplinary understanding of the development of communities as part of New Brunswick’s past.

The remaining articles in this special issue examine some of the current and future challenges faced by the province, as well as present strategies for sustaining or possibly enhancing growth in New Brunswick’s communities.

In “Building Futures: Career and Community Development in Small New Brunswick Towns,” Fabrizio Antonelli examines the problem communities face in retaining youth during their career development. Through a study of two New Brunswick towns and their secondary schools, Antonelli explores some of the challenges faced by teachers and students regarding future employment and possibilities of remaining in home communities. If communities in New Brunswick are unable to retain youth, then we can see issues develop with aging populations and the services required to maintain a high quality of life in these communities. In a similar vein, the articles by Odette Gould, Heather Webster, Elizabeth Daniels, and Suzanne Dupuis-Blanchard, “Transportation for Seniors in a Rural Community: Can the Nursing Home Play a Role?” and Dupuis-Blanchard, Gould, and Ilisha French, “L’importance de planifier en vue du vieillissement de la population: notre ville est-elle amie des aînés?” uncover many of the issues faced by communities in providing necessary amenities to ensure a high quality of life for its community members. Specifically, these articles examine transportation and access to community resources among the older populations of two communities. As the authors point out, there are demographic shifts on the horizon in New Brunswick that will present challenges to develop an infrastructure for all citizens to remain active and engaged within their communities.

Finally, to address some of the challenges going forward, articles by Erik Fraser, “Place-Conscious Pedagogy and Sackville, New Brunswick, as a Learning Community” and Natalie Gillis, “Implementing a Made-in-New Brunswick Outdoor Environmental Education Program: A Case Study of Salem Elementary School,” present possible solutions to some of the problems experienced in small communities in New Brunswick. Both Fraser and Gillis take a formal educational approach to connecting the institution of schooling with place and community development. The articles present case studies of educational programs developed and delivered in Sackville that expose students of various ages and academic levels to the community. Unique to Sackville and New Brunswick, we can see a clear connection between Mount Allison, its students and faculty, and the larger community where resources, ideas, and efforts are shared to greatly enhance the learning experiences of students as community members.

The collection of articles in this special issue demonstrate past, present, and future challenges for communities in New Brunswick. The multidisciplinary approach allows the reader to view community from many different perspectives. The articles demonstrate the efforts made by faculty, students, and communities to address some of these challenges with an aim to making communities more vibrant and livable. Finally, the articles demonstrate the importance and effectiveness of research conducted in small communities as part of the necessary practices that foster community engagement and growth.