A TRIBUTE TO BILL PARENTEAU: ON THE IMPORTANCE OF HIS WORK TO NEW BRUNSWICK HISTORY

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It is a daunting task to attempt to assess the impact of someone's body of research, amassed over the entirety of an academic career. It is especially so when the scholar in question was your PhD supervisor, colleague, collaborator, and (most importantly) friend. Bill Parenteau passed away in mid-October 2023.¹ Others, including Bill's sister Kerry Pascetta and his friend Daniel Samson, have expounded upon what made Bill an incredible person.² I will be limiting my comments to the importance of his work to New Brunswick history, but I echo the sentiments that Kerry and Daniel expressed so well.

My comprehension of Bill's research and its contribution to our understanding of New Brunswick's past is shaped by having known him for more than 20 years. I first met Bill during my undergraduate studies at the University of New Brunswick (UNB) in Fredericton (1998–2003). After two and a half years of exploring options in combined arts-science and science degrees, I discovered the joy of studying history (based upon the advice of Peter Kent, another great scholar who we lost in 2023).³ At first, I was one of those students who loved to learn about the world wars. Luckily that all changed when I took Bill's courses on the pre- and post-Confederation history of Atlantic Canada. Bill's honours seminar on environmental history later introduced me to the historical field that would form the basis of my own academic career. A mentor from early on, it was Bill's advice that helped guide me to Memorial University of Newfoundland for my MA in history (under the supervision of Sean Cadigan). After seeing me present some of my MA research at the 2005 meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, Bill offered to be my PhD supervisor, if I chose that path. From 2006–2013, Bill and I worked closely together as I inched toward the completion of my PhD, a time filled with lots of deep discussions, the occasional butting of heads, and "meetings" at the grad house. Bill was there, in one capacity or another, when I secured my SSHRC postdoctoral fellowship (Trent University, 2014–2015, with Stephen Bocking), was hired at the University of Maine (2015, started in 2016), and was eventually awarded tenure (2023). Needless to say, I would not be where I am today without Bill Parenteau.

One of the first things to understand about Bill's body of research is the context from which it emerged. Bill did his MA in Canadian-American history at the University of Maine (UMaine), under the supervision of Richard Judd, from 1984–1986, on the contractor system in the Maine pulpwood industry in the first three-quarters of the twentieth century.⁴ From there (and after a brief stint working at a deli in New York City), he moved on to UNB, where he worked on his PhD in Canadian history until 1994. It was during this time in the late 1980s and early 1990s that the next generation of the "Acadiensis School" was being trained, with Bill being one of them. The Acadiensis School was a group of scholars who, starting in the late 1960s and 1970s, promoted the study of Atlantic Canada as being as valid as other Canadian regions that more often formed the bulk of the "national" historical narrative. They were instrumental in the founding of the journal *Acadiensis* and the biennial Atlantic Canada Studies Conference. ⁵ UNB was one of the epicentres of this Atlantic Canadian promotional effort, with the likes of Phillip Buckner, David Frank, E.R. "Ernie" Forbes, T.W. Acheson, and Gail Campbell leading the way. It was under the tutelage of David Frank, his PhD supervisor, and Ernie Forbes, and from many hours of debate with his fellow graduate students, including friends (and fellow members of the next generation) Daniel Samson and James Kenny, that Bill developed a passion for the history of Atlantic Canada, and especially that of New Brunswick. "The Project," as Ernie liked to call it (the promotion of the study of Atlantic Canada), would help shape Bill's research for

the remainder of his career. He consistently asserted that historical events in smaller provinces like New Brunswick were part of national and international trends and processes to the same degree as more populated places like Ontario.

It was also during this period in the late 1980s and early 1990s that many of the core tenets of Bill's approach to historical work were formed:

- **Structuralism**: In the age-old debate of structure versus human agency, Bill definitely came down on the side of the importance of understanding structural influences when examining change over time. During one of our many meetings back in my PhD days, I was making some point based on someone's biography, and Bill quipped, with that mischievous glint in his eyes, "So what? We both know that individuals don't matter." He was joking, of course. In fact, Bill cared deeply about individuals' lived experiences, but especially how they navigated the structures that shaped or tried to shape their lives.
- **Political economy/state theory**: The structural forces that Bill was most interested in were politics and economics (especially monopoly capital). He never studied them separately, though. Bill considered himself to be a political economist; that is, you could not understand politics without economics, and vice versa. Much of his application of political economy was funneled through state theory. By studying scholars like Bob Jessop, Bill understood the state not as a monolithic entity, but rather as an amalgam of various institutions, departments, and individuals that sometimes have competing agendas.⁶
- Focus on resistance and resilience: There was a deep thread of resistance and resilience, particularly that of rural peoples, against power structures in most of Bill's work. If structural forces, in particular the words and actions of political and economic elites, had such significant effects on individuals' lives, then it was that much more noteworthy when there were instances of resistance and resilience, both successful and unsuccessful. Bill believed that even failed attempts offered examples of hope, pointed to the fact that the way things are now did not necessarily mean they were always this way, and it demonstrated that people might have had another vision of how society should be structured.
- **Historical materialism**: Bill was also strongly influenced by materialism, that the material conditions of people's everyday lives shaped their historical experiences. Past individuals did specific things for a reason, which was usually related to their material reality. For Bill, people did not resist political and economic elites simply for the sake of resisting, but did so because some aspect of their material lives was altered and/or threatened.
- **Knowledge mobilization**: Bill believed that we can mobilize knowledge of the past to make change in the present. He also told me repeatedly that it made no sense to have the protections that come with tenure and not use that fortunate position to better the world in some way. All of this was a reflection of his long-term commitment to social justice issues, which was rooted in his working-class background. This core tenet of Bill's life made itself particularly known during the last 15 or so years of his career.
- Effective communication: To mobilize knowledge, it had to be communicated effectively. This was one lesson that Bill made a point to impart to all of his students, that if you take the time to create historical knowledge, then also make the effort to communicate it as clearly as possible. Bill was as good a communicator as they come, whether it was the written or spoken word. He

was an articulate and accessible writer and could make complex issues and arguments easy to understand. He was also an excellent editor. My use of run-on sentences and the passive voice is much less than it used to be, thanks to the copious amounts of red ink that flowed from Bill's editorial pen.

Bill's initial research interest was the political economy of natural resource exploitation. As he switched from UMaine to UNB for doctoral studies, Bill did the same with his research subject matter, shifting focus from the forests of Maine to those in New Brunswick. By the late 1980s, there was a fairly substantial body of scholarship on the New Brunswick forest industries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including the work of A.R.M. Lower, Michael S. Cross, and Graeme Wynn. This left the twentieth century largely unexplored, and for his PhD dissertation Bill honed in on the transition from lumber to pulp and paper in the 1920s and 1930s. He did not view it as a "natural" transition, but rather one mired in capital-state relations. Central to his dissertation was the theme of resistance. He argued that, by the early 1930s, a broad-based, cross-class social movement had developed in New Brunswick to address the structural problems with pulp and paper. These were people who were more interested in the province's forests, particularly the Crown (public) forests, being used for the benefit of New Brunswick communities, not corporations. Bill completed his PhD in 1994, and subsequently published parts of his dissertation research as two journal articles and a book chapter. The forest industries, both in New Brunswick and beyond, would remain a key component of Bill's research for the rest of his career.

After his PhD, Bill's research expanded to include fish and game regulation and management in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Perhaps seemingly far removed from the forest industries, it was simply an extension of his interests in the state, the actions of elites, the material lives of rural people, and rural resistance and resilience. This aspect of his research really took off during a SSHRC postdoctoral fellowship with Del Muise at Carleton University in 1994–1995. The species that attracted Bill's attention the most was the Atlantic salmon. He was particularly fascinated by how political and economic elites were obsessed with salmon and salmon angling, to the point that they established fishing lodges on waterways across eastern Canada, many of which were in northern New Brunswick, and implemented comprehensive salmon conservation and management programs in several provinces in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Often contained within these programs were various elements of the "sportsmen's code," that there was a "proper" and gentleman-like way to fish and hunt, as opposed to oft-derided traditional methods. Conservation and management programs had significant effects on the subsistence activities of rural people, who often had a cultural understanding of fish and game as public resources, in New Brunswick and elsewhere. Unsurprisingly, social conflict frequently followed.¹¹

It was also in the mid-to-late 1990s that Bill first began thinking of himself as an environmental historian. Environmental history (the study of humans and nature in the past) emerged in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, but did not develop as a field in Canada until the 1990s, and even then did not really flourish until the founding of the Network in Canadian History and Environment in 2004. Bill liked to say that he was just doing his own thing and then one day the environmental historians caught up to him. In any event, he was one of the scholars who brought environmental history to Atlantic Canada, and among the first (along with James Kenny) to consistently focus on New Brunswick history. There were many years when if anyone thought of New Brunswick and environmental history, Bill's name was most likely the first one that would come to mind.

By the late 1990s, Bill's research had further expanded to include Indigenous peoples. This was in many ways a logical extension: Indigenous peoples were often dispossessed of access to forests, they had worked in the forest industries from the outset, they were among the most affected by fish and game regulation and management, and many of them worked as guides for hunting and fishing parties. From 1995–1997, Bill was employed as a consultant with the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Specific Claims Directorate), to investigate Indigenous claims to land and natural resources in the Maritimes, Quebec, and Ontario. He was also contracted to write reports on Indigenous rights and claims for government agencies in 1997–1998. Furthermore, this was the time when important events like the 1999 Marshall Decision were ensuring that Indigenous issues were receiving more press coverage and public attention than ever before. Hall was part of a group of scholars who helped unpack the historical roots of Indigenous dispossession and exclusion in New Brunswick and the rest of Canada, while also centering their historical agency, resistance, and resilience. It also provided an opportunity for him to establish a fruitful collaboration with his friend James Kenny. 15

After many years of historical research, Bill was in a position to mobilize knowledge for good by the mid-2000s. After working as an archivist with the Government Archives and Records Disposition Division of the National Archives of Canada from 1997–2000, he was hired, in 2000, as an assistant professor at UNB, and it was at this point that I first met Bill. My PhD research was in some ways a continuation of what Bill had started during his doctoral studies. His dissertation stopped in 1939, mine started in 1940, and I focussed on Crown forest management in New Brunswick up until the early 1980s. ¹⁶ A couple of years into my PhD, Bill and I co-authored a chapter on the long-term structural problems of the New Brunswick pulp and paper industry and what that meant for the present. ¹⁷ Terry Seguin, with CBC Radio in Fredericton, read the piece and invited Bill on his show to discuss the state of the New Brunswick forest industries, an interview that did not go over well with J.D. Irving Limited, to say the least, who sent a testy letter from their legal counsel to Bill. This was the beginning of Bill using his privileged position to speak out for the need for structural change within the forest industries for the benefit of both New Brunswickers and the environment. For years afterwards, Bill was active as a public commentator on forestry in New Brunswick, publishing informed opinion pieces and giving numerous presentations. ¹⁸

It was not long after Bill began speaking out publicly on forestry matters that he also became an increasingly vocal advocate for Indigenous rights and land and resources claims. He had continued over the years to write historical reports on Indigenous issues for government agencies. ¹⁹ In 2013, he served as an expert witness, on the side of the Wolastoqiyik, in a treaty rights case regarding access to Crown lands. This was followed by his work, alongside his colleague and friend Elizabeth Mancke (and another great scholar who we lost in 2023), ²⁰ with the Madawaska Maliseet First Nation. The Madawaska Maliseet launched a federal land claim in 1996, and Bill and Elizabeth joined the effort as expert witnesses in the mid-2010s. With their help, the Madawaska Maliseet First Nation won the land claim, resulting in a \$145 million pay out in 2021, the largest in New Brunswick and Maritime history. ²¹ Bill often mentioned that of all the things that he did during his career, it was his work with Indigenous peoples that he was most proud of.

There is no doubt that Bill Parenteau's research has had a significant impact on New Brunswick history. And yet, I have barely scratched the surface of what Bill accomplished during his career: he taught hundreds of undergraduate students; supervised 22 graduate students; served for seven years as the editor of *Acadiensis*; was involved with the Labour History in New Brunswick project (archives.gnb.ca/lhtnb/Welcome_en-CA.aspx); published an edited book²²; gave close to 40 conference

presentations and more than 30 invited presentations; received numerous awards and grants; and many instances of service to the UNB community and academia in general, including with his union, the Association of University of New Brunswick Teachers.



Bill Parenteau standing in front of a mural reproduction of Maud Lewis's painting Yellow Birds. This photograph contains a variety of Bill's interests, including the arts, the environment, and the Boston Red Sox. Lewis was Bill's artistic inspiration when he worked with mixed media later in life. Photograph courtesy of Helen Tai.

Bill officially retired in 2020. After a long career, he was able to spend his last few years with family and friends and working on his mixed-media art (which, of course, contained deep themes of social justice). I miss my friend and colleague, but take some solace in the fact that he left us with such a rich body of research that has left an indelible mark on New Brunswick history and the province generally.

To comment on this essay, please write to editorjnbs@stu.ca. Si vous souhaitez réagir à cet essai, veuillez soit nous écrire à editorjnbs@stu.ca.

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Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Bill's wife Helen Tai for providing the most up-to-date version of Bill's curriculum vitae and the photograph of Bill and for her comments on this piece. I would also like to thank James Kenny for his feedback and encouraging words. Thank you to Bonnie Huskins for inviting me to speak to her HIST 6302: History of Atlantic Canada graduate seminar in January 2024, where I first expressed some of my thoughts and ideas for this tribute. Finally, a big thank you to Michael Boudreau and the *Journal of New Brunswick Studies/Revue d'études sur le Nouveau-Brunswick* for giving me the opportunity to write about my friend and colleague. It helped to provide some closure.

Notes

¹ For Bill's obituary, see "Obituary of William Mark 'Bill' Parenteau," *McAdam's Funeral Home*, mcadamsfh.com/tribute/details/1496/William-Parenteau/obituary.html.

² Kerry Pascetta, "Eulogy for Bill Parenteau," *The Acadiensis Blog*, 4 December 2023, acadiensis.wordpress.com/2023/12/04/eulogy-for-bill-parenteau/ and Daniel Samson, "Bill Parenteau (1959–2023)," *The Acadiensis Blog*, 15 January 2024, acadiensis.wordpress.com/2024/01/15/bill-parenteau-1959-2023/.

³ "Obituary of Peter Clifford Kent," *McAdam's Funeral Home*, https://mcadamsfh.com/tribute/details/1393/Peter-Kent/obituary.html.

⁴ William M. Parenteau, "The Rise of the Small Contractor: A Study of Technological and Structural Change in the Maine Pulpwood Industry, 1900–1975," MA thesis, University of Maine, 1986.

⁵ For an explanation of the Acadiensis School during the last few decades of the twentieth century, with a particular focus on the journal, see David Frank, "Acadiensis, 1901 and 1999," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 30, 3 (Winter 2000): 365–80.

⁶ Bob Jessop, *State Theory: Putting the Capitalist State in its Place* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990). I spent many hours during my PhD grappling with the big-minded ideas in this book, and then many more discussing them with Bill. I blame more than one headache from this period on Bill's penchant for theory.

¹⁰ Parenteau, "Pulp, Paper, and Poverty: Then and Now in the New Brunswick Woods," New Maritimes VII,4 (March/April 1989): 20–6; Parenteau, "In Good Faith: The Development of Pulpwood Marketing for Independent Producers in New Brunswick, 1960–1975," Trouble in the Woods: Forest Policy and Social Conflict in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, ed. L Anders Sandberg (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1992), 110-41; Parenteau, "Bonded Labor: Canadian Woods Workers in the Maine Pulpwood Industry, 1940–1955," Forest and Conservation History 37, 3 (July1993): 108–19; Parenteau, "The New Brunswick Forest Heritage: A History of the Forest Industries, 1780–1930," unpublished manuscript prepared for Parks Canada, 1994; Sandberg and Parenteau, "From Weapons to Symbols of Privilege: Political Cartoons and the Rise and Fall of the Pulpwood Embargo Debate in Nova Scotia, 1923–1933," Acadiensis 28, 2 (Spring/Printemps1997): 31–58; Parenteau, "Making 'room for economy, efficiency and conservation': Progressive Forest Conservation in New Brunswick, 1900–1918," Land and Sea: Environmental History in Atlantic Canada, eds. Claire Campbell and Robert Summerby-Murray (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 2013), 121–41, 287–92; Parenteau, "Growing Pains: Edward Partington and the Early Wood Pulp Industry in New Brunswick, 1890–1910," Forestry Chronicle 90, 3 (June 2014): 347–50; and Mark J. McLaughlin and Parenteau, "From Timber Colony to Pulp Province: Capital, State, and Society in the New Brunswick Forest Industries, 1780–2020," Canada's Forests, Vol. 1, eds. Wynn and David Brownstein (Canberra: Australian National University Press, forthcoming).

⁷ A.R.M. Lower, Settlement and the Forest Frontier in Eastern Canada (Toronto: MacMillan, 1936); Lower, The North American Assault on the Canadian Forest: A History of the Lumber Trade Between Canada and the United States (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1938); Lower, Great Britain's Woodyard: British America and the Timber Trade, 1763–1867 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1973); Michael S. Cross, "The Dark Druidical Groves: The Lumber Community and the Commercial Frontier in British North America, to 1854," PhD diss, University of Toronto, 1968; and Graeme Wynn, Timber Colony: A Historical Geography of Early Nineteenth Century New Brunswick (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981).

⁸ Parenteau, "Forest and Society in New Brunswick: The Political Economy of the Forest Industries, 1918–1939," PhD diss, University of New Brunswick, 1994.

⁹ Parenteau, "The Woods Transformed: The Emergence of the Pulp and Paper Industry in New Brunswick, 1918–1931," *Acadiensis* 22, 1 (Autumn/Automne1992): 5–43; Parenteau and L. Anders Sandberg, "Conservation and the Gospel of Economic Nationalism: The Canadian Pulpwood Question in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, 1918–1925," *Environmental History Review* 19, 2 (Summer1995): 55–83; and Parenteau, "Settlement and the Forest Frontier Revisited: Class Politics and the Administration of the New Brunswick Labor Act, 1918–1929," *Contested Countryside: Rural Workers and Modern Society in Atlantic Canada, 1800–1950*, ed. Daniel Samson (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1994), 180–224.

¹¹ For Bill's research on fish and game regulation and management in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Parenteau, "Care, Control and Supervision': Native People in the Canadian Atlantic Salmon Fishery, 1867–1900," Canadian Historical Review 79, 1 (March 1998): 1–35 (this article won the CHR prize for best essay in 1998 and was reprinted in two Canadian history texts; see Margaret Conrad and Alvin Finkel, eds., Nations and Society: Readings in Post-Confederation Canadian History [Toronto: Pearson Longman, 2004] and James Opp and John C. Walsh, eds., Home, Work, and Play: Situating Canadian Social History, 1840–1980 [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006]); Parenteau, "Angling, Hunting, and the Development of Tourism in Late Nineteenth Century Canada: A Glimpse at the Documentary Record," The Archivist 117 (1999): 10-20; Parenteau, "State Regulation and Changing Patterns of Resource Use in the St. John River Fisheries, 1867–1900," Caring for the Water that Connects Us, Proceedings of the Third Canadian River Heritage Conference, eds. Maria Bourgeois and David Folster (Fredericton: New Brunswick Department of Environment, 2001), 38-41; Parenteau, "A 'very determined opposition to the law': Conservation, Angling Leases, and Social Conflict in the Canadian Atlantic Salmon Fishery, 1867–1914," Environmental History 9, 3 (July 2004): 436-63; and Parenteau and Richard W. Judd, "More Buck for the Bang: Sporting and the Ideology of Fish and Game Management in Late Nineteenth Century New England and the Maritimes," New England and the Maritime Provinces: Comparisons and Connections, eds. Stephen Hornsby and John Reid (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 232–51.

¹² "About," Network in Canadian History and Environment website, niche-canada.org/about/.

¹³ For example, see Parenteau, "An Analysis of Native Use Patterns and Rights to the Forest, Fish and Game Resources of New Brunswick, 1867–present", report for the University of New Brunswick Law School for the New Brunswick Directorate of Aboriginal Affairs, 1998.

¹⁴ On the Marshall Decision, see Ken S. Coates, *The Marshall Decision and Native Rights: The Marshall Decision and Mi'kmaq Rights in the Maritimes* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000); for Bill's review of Coates's book, see *Labour/Le Travail* 50 (2002): 315–17. Bill wrote almost 20 book reviews over the course of his career.

¹⁵ Parenteau, "'Care, Control and Supervision'"; Parenteau and James Kenny, "Resistance, Survival, and the Canadian State: The Transformation of the Native Economy in New Brunswick, 1867–1930," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 13, 1 (2002): 49–71; Parenteau, "Reflections on *The Great Land Rush*: Snapshots from British North America," *Canadian Historical Review* 93, 2 (June 2012): 261–66; and Kenny and Parenteau, "'Each year the Indians flexed their muscles a little more': The Maliseet Defence of Aboriginal Fishing Rights on the St. John River, 1945–1990," *Canadian Historical Review* 95, 2 (June 2014): 187–216.

¹⁶ McLaughlin, "Trees Are a Crop': Crown Lands, Labour, and the Environment in the New Brunswick Forest Industries, 1940–1982," PhD diss, University of New Brunswick, 2013.

¹⁷ McLaughlin and Parenteau, "A 'Fundamental Cost that We Can't Deal With?': The Political Economy of the Pulp and Paper Industry in New Brunswick, 1960–Present," *Exploring the Dimensions of Self-Sufficiency for New Brunswick*, eds. Michael Boudreau, Peter G. Toner, and Tony Tremblay (Fredericton: New Brunswick and Atlantic Studies Research and Development Centre and St. Thomas University, 2009), 13–34.

- ¹⁸ For example, see Parenteau, "Looking Backward, Looking Ahead: History and the Future of the New Brunswick Forest Industries," *Acadiensis* 42, 2 (2013): 92–113 (based on his Ideas that Matter lecture: https://acadiensis.wordpress.com/2017/03/01/bill-parenteau-looking-back-looking-ahead-history-and-the-future-of-the-new-brunswick-forest-industries/) and Parenteau and McLaughlin, "Winning the Race to the Bottom: New Brunswick Forestry in Historical Context," presentation as part of the Tertulia Lecture Series, *NB Media Co-op*, 18 June 2021, nbmediacoop.org/2021/06/18/28296/. All of this also speaks to Bill's dedication to and willingness to engage in public history.
- ¹⁹ For example, see Parenteau, "The Making and Evolution of Treaties between the Mi'kmaq and Malecite of Quebec and the Crown," report for the Department of Justice, Province of Quebec, 2011.
- ²⁰ "Obituary of Elizabeth Mancke," *McAdam's Funeral Home* https://mcadamsfh.com/tribute/details/1477/Elizabeth-Mancke/obituary.html; Borealia, "Remembering Elizabeth Mancke, part I and part II," https://earlycanadianhistory.ca/2023/10/24/remembering-elizabeth-mancke-ii/. and https://earlycanadianhistory.ca/2023/10/26/remembering-elizabeth-mancke-ii/.
- ²¹ Marie Sutherland, "N.B. First Nation wins historic \$145M land claim settlement after decades long battle," *CBC News New Brunswick*, 12 April 2021, www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/madawaska-land-claim-patricia-bernard-1.5984019 and John Chilibeck, "Trio of scholars in landmark First Nations case die," *NB Media Co-op*, 26 October 2023, nbmediacoop.org/2023/10/26/trio-of-scholars-in-landmark-first-nations-case-die/.
- ²² Parenteau and Stephen Dutcher, eds., *War on the Home Front: The Farm Diaries of Daniel MacMillan*, 1914–1927 (Fredericton: Goose Lane Editions, 2006).