

Post-Confederation Newfoundland(er) Identity, 1949–1991

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In the summer of 1978, an unidentified interviewee from Newfoundland described the relationship between the state of national identity in Canada and Newfoundland by simply stating, “I hear of Canadians looking for an identity. To me that’s funny. Newfoundlanders have one.”¹ In a report submitted to the federal Task Force on Canadian Unity, the interviewed individual emphasized the belief that Newfoundlanders have a solid sense of self in terms of their cultural identity. Even with three decades of Canadian-born citizens, residents of the island portion of the province still readily identified as Newfoundlanders before identifying as Canadians; the explanation was twofold. First, Newfoundlanders had a more defined, regionalized identity within Canada, which permits an ease of recognizable cultural identification. Second, English-Canadian identity, in comparison, was not as clearly articulated; it lacked the uniting essence typical of a national identity. While (English) Canadians are often content and even proud to be Canadian, what it means to be Canadian is not unanimous throughout the country. In contrast, regional identities, such as Newfoundland’s, largely flourish within Canada.

Prior to its formal union with Canada in 1949, Newfoundland (like Canada) was an autonomous state within the British Empire, complete with its own passports, currency, and prime ministers. Many scholars agree that Newfoundland has since kept its own separate cultural identity, with an established cultural nationalism and a

small but dedicated few who romanticize notions of separatism, much like Quebec and, more recently, Alberta, though Newfoundland has never come close to separation.² In the new province's earliest decades as part of Canada, the provincial government, led by its first and longest-reigning premier, Joseph R. Smallwood, set out to modernize and bring itself up to Canadian national standards. Yet, in response to this, some Newfoundlanders and those who were studying them sought to safeguard Newfoundland's cultural identity and its uniqueness in Canada by pushing back against the modernization that was seen as an affront to the believed "traditional" Newfoundland culture and heritage. This became known as the cultural revival movement, which helped to solidify a distinct identity for Newfoundlanders in Canada that set them apart and highlighted their difference from the rest of Canada. Romanticism played a strong role in this new-found and reactionary cultural nationalism, as did a level of dissatisfaction with Confederation.

This paper does not strongly consider other possible explanations for the growth of post-Confederation Newfoundland(er) identity, such as out-migration. While the post-Confederation period witnessed an increase in the migration of Newfoundlanders to other parts of Canada, out-migration from Newfoundland to Canada had been occurring prior to Confederation, so it is unlikely that it played a significant role in the growth of Newfoundland(er) identity post-1949. In more recent decades, out-migration has likely played an increased role in shaping Newfoundland(er) identity and the feelings of inferiority in the province (especially since the 1992 cod moratorium). However, in the period of this study (1949–91) there was population growth in spite of the increase in out-migration.³

The rationale for ending the inquiry in 1991 is directly related to the cod moratorium that began in 1992. The federally imposed moratorium, due to mismanagement of the cod fishery at both the provincial and federal levels, drastically altered socio-economic conditions in Newfoundland, as well as its relationship with the federal government. This had significant effects on later-stage post-Confederation New-

foundland identity — given the significance of the cod fishery, an immediate sense of loss (similar to that of the Confederation era) created a lasting impact on the mentality of those in the province.

Through a close reading of government documents, academic literature, and opinions of Newfoundlanders from the post-Confederation period, this paper argues that through an intensification of localized identity in reaction to imposed modernization measures from the provincial government, Newfoundlanders established a distinct regionalized identity within Canada. A variety of sources have been used throughout this study, with the most significant being opinion pieces, opinion polls, and survey studies that evidence Newfoundlanders' positions regarding their identity, continued negative feelings concerning Confederation, and heightened appreciation for their cultural difference, which allowed for their continued regional identification. Several surveys and academic studies have examined Newfoundland's identity and place within Canada, some research based at Memorial University and other studies commissioned by the provincial government in an effort to demonstrate the progress made by the newest province. Information such as this provides evidence of how the process of adopting the larger national identity does not diminish the persistence of a regional identity, and that one need not negate the other. In addition to these studies, many individuals expressed their opinions on Confederation across the period in a variety of op-eds. These studies and opinion pieces provide a window into the thoughts and opinions of Newfoundlanders and those who were studying them during that time.

During the 1960s, Newfoundlanders' discontent with being forced to leave behind their rural lifestyle and adapt to the more modernized metropole was beginning to foster a movement that saw the rebirth of rural culture and life; this came to be known as the cultural revival. As such, the movement itself is in part reactionary to the program of modernization employed by the Smallwood government during the early post-Confederation period, when modernization theory was at its peak.⁴ The cultural revival movement began in the later

1960s and continued until a moderate decline in the later 1980s.⁵ This revival helped further entrench the province's distinct identity during the period in which Newfoundlanders were also acclimating to their new Canadian reality. The discussion of the ongoing cultural revival and Newfoundland identity during the period, both in the academic community and in the wider society, demonstrates how prevalent this movement was and the importance it had in reiterating and strengthening Newfoundland's identity both within the province and throughout the rest of the country.

This paper argues that the post-Confederation surge in Newfoundland cultural nationalism was at least in part a response to the heavy push for modernization by the Smallwood government during the period. In turn, Newfoundlanders (re)embraced their Newfoundland identity, which was now enveloped in this new-found cultural nationalism, while they were becoming Canadian in the decades following Confederation. Identity is central to who people are, as individuals and as collective groups. Why identity is so important for Newfoundlanders lies in the desire to differentiate themselves from others, whether those others are the British, foreign fishers, Canadians or Americans in pre-Confederation Newfoundland, or simply other English Canadians since 1949. This paper provides the context of the province's Confederation era and the provincial government's modernization efforts; examines the post-Confederation surge in Newfoundland's cultural nationalism; and illustrates the effects of the cultural revival by the measure of those who strongly identify as Newfoundlanders. The Smallwood government's push for modernization in the immediate post-Confederation period, telling Newfoundlanders to "burn their boats" and to turn their backs on what distinction they had from the rest of English Canada, inadvertently spawned a more steadfast Newfoundlander identity, which Newfoundlanders then used to push back against fully assimilating into the larger English-Canadian identity.

A Primer on Newfoundland Identity

Without denying the complex and loaded nature of how to define “identity”⁶ for this paper’s purposes, “national identity” is the idea of a social construction of collective consciousness that shares an “attachment” to the nation in question and enables a sense of shared qualities. In brief, it creates a “sameness” among them.⁷ Ernest Gellner’s theory of nationalism is relevant here. He describes the nation as a sociological construction of modernization and nationalism, as “primarily a political principle that holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent.” Therefore, a standardized (official) cultural identity is required of the modern nation, predicated on the necessity of national unity.⁸ On the one hand, national identity should be differentiated from the concept of nationalism, as a national identity is less dedicated to the directly patriotic goals of nationalism even though national identity can form under much of the same criteria, such as a shared language, culture, and ethnicity. On the other, national identity can be understood as the set of historical features that define a people, while nationalism can be understood as the realization of these features and the will to “promote” them — in this regard, we see both national identity and nationalism at play in the context of post-Confederation Newfoundland.⁹

Inquiring about national identity in the past requires appreciating how people understood themselves and what influences were present in the shaping of their beliefs. As well, nations do not operate in isolation; influence from other nations affects many areas of a nation’s consciousness, from its borders to its ideologies and cultures. For Newfoundland, it is crucial to remember that it was part of the British Empire, and understanding Newfoundland’s national identity requires an awareness that it was part of that Empire, as well as the implications of such a past. Additionally, as a continued part of the Commonwealth since union with Canada, Newfoundland and Labrador remains actively tied to that past, which continues to shape the people’s identity or identities.¹⁰

Concerning Newfoundland(er) identity specifically, the focus here is primarily on the island portion of the province, which is treated as a cohesive unit despite its internal regional differences. The identity in question, which was studied and promoted during the post-Confederation period, is best described as a homogeneous Newfoundland *national* identity — despite this particular identity being overwhelming simplified, romanticized, and even mythologized. Historical and present-day Newfoundland and its people are predominately thought of and often depicted as white, Anglo-Irish, and Christian. While the demographic statistics for the island of Newfoundland show this characterization to be the case for the majority of the province's population, it is certainly not representative of all who live and have lived there. While acknowledging that this did not include everyone who lived in the province during this time, such as descendants of non-Anglo-Irish immigrants, Indigenous people, and Franco-Newfoundlanders, the national identity of Newfoundland is the focus and the identities of other cultural and national groups within Newfoundland and Labrador interact with one another — culturally, politically, and otherwise.

The literature pertaining to the history of post-Confederation Newfoundland contains little concerning constructions of identity in the period, and disagreement in the understanding of its own regional, cultural, and even national identity. Sean Cadigan argues ardently against the notion of Newfoundland being a nation, cultural or otherwise, while Robert Thomsen orients his work around the belief that Newfoundland is indeed a nation with a distinct cultural identity and an unreserved political nationalism in its post-Confederation period. Others, such as Jeff Webb, have investigated Newfoundland's distinct cultural identity in its post-Confederation period, as well as the revival of "traditional" culture in the province. In addition, Raymond Blake has thoroughly addressed Newfoundland's integration as a Canadian province and the challenges between Newfoundland and Ottawa that have occurred in the time since, but always in the socio-economic, political, and intergovernmental spheres, as opposed to the cultural.¹¹ In general, there is a separation of the more cultural from the more

directly political narratives in Newfoundland historiography. Identifying links between the spheres within Newfoundland's historical writing could provide a more robust understanding of the history itself, as well as the connection between Newfoundland's political and cultural identities. Bringing together these two spheres of historical writing is this paper's contribution to the historiography.

Newfoundland(er) identity has been under-analyzed in the historical literature, especially from a perspective centred on national and cultural identities. This paper supports a familiar sentiment of anti-modernism in Atlantic Canada in iterating that at least some Newfoundlanders were culturally resistant to modernization. Ian McKay's *Quest of Folk*, a study of anti-modernism in Nova Scotia during the twentieth century, is a pivotal work in this area, and Newfoundland scholars such as Jerry Bannister and James Overton have contributed studies where the resistance to modernization thesis is at least alluded to in the Newfoundland context.¹² This work seeks not to correct or disprove earlier work but rather to add to the narrative, illuminating a line of inquiry and perspective previously ignored or undervalued.

Newfoundland's Contentious Union with Canada and the Push for Modernization

Newfoundland's union with Canada was contentious. After a long period of debate and negotiation in post-war Newfoundland and Canada, Newfoundlanders held two referendums on whether or not to join Canada. The first referendum, held on 3 June 1948, had no clear majority across the three options of: independence, Confederation with Canada, or continuation of the Commission of Government. Thus, a second vote was held on 22 July 1948, with the outcome being 52.34 per cent in favour of Confederation with Canada and 47.66 per cent against the union.¹³ There was immediate response from "patriotic" Newfoundlanders opposed to Confederation, with St. John's daily newspapers publishing letters replete with considerably emotive language expressing their distaste with the state of affairs

they now found themselves in.¹⁴ These types of lamentations picked up again on 31 March 1949, the eve of Confederation, and continued after the fact, expressing discomfort with losing independence and the writers' fears of having to become Canadians, thereby losing their identity as Newfoundlanders.¹⁵

In 1949, the population of Newfoundland was approximately 345,000 and within 20 years it had risen to 514,000, split between rural and urban populations.¹⁶ The relatively even distribution of the population was not a natural occurrence, as the provincial government under Smallwood had orchestrated various relocation schemes beginning in the mid-1950s. These resettlement programs were a considerable part of the provincial government-led modernization initiatives that were implemented due to the need for Newfoundland to be brought up to the Canadian socio-economic standard, as outlined in the Terms of Union. The resettlement program made direct efforts to resettle hundreds of isolated outport communities, beginning in 1953 with the provincial government program and continuing with the joint federal-provincial Household Resettlement Program in 1965. From the 1950s to the 1970s, the federal government undertook resettlement programs in various marginalized and regional pockets throughout the country. Such groups as the Inuit in the Arctic, Chinese Canadians in Vancouver, and Black Canadians in Halifax are examples of the Canadian government's forced relocation programs. Newfoundland became another, much broader, example.¹⁷

In Canada's newest province, these programs were aimed at relocating the widely dispersed population along the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador to centralized locations in the province to reduce costs in areas such as health care and education. This involved the literal relocation of entire communities from their isolated fishing villages to create "growth poles" in order to attract industry and development. Such resettlement was meant to rectify the financial and logistical difficulties that arose while modernizing the province and trying to meet Canadian standards of service. Initially, many people located in outport communities went along with the resettlement

programs. Women especially, due to the often limited options in their isolated communities, were incentivized by the government buyout and by the promise of better social and health services for their families. However, as time went on, opinions towards these programs changed.¹⁸ This was a complex situation. Newfoundlanders felt a level of discontent with the government-led modernization efforts, which were effectively forcing them to leave behind the lives they knew; yet they wanted to modernize, to be able to access the better quality of life that being part of Canada offered them upon their union.

Regarding this government-led process of large-scale modernization, on 30 December 1961, the *Daily News* boasted that the first 12 years of Confederation were “revolutionary” for Newfoundland and that this was believed to be the “full period required for complete re-adjustment” with the termination of the transitional grant from the federal government. The article remarked on the “explosive change” that occurred, where Newfoundland moved from being “one of the most primitive societies in the world of western civilization” to acquiring vastly improved services and modernization with a population that had “doubled in forty years and increased one-third at least since confederation.” However, it also addressed how this progress was expensive and difficult to maintain, especially with the need to meet national standards of public services. Stress was placed on the knowledge that Newfoundland could no longer measure life by its “own standards” and was now required to meet Canadian national standards.¹⁹

As the years passed, how the new province was fairing since Confederation became a frequent topic for the provincial government and academics. In 1966, an edited collection commissioned by the provincial government documented the progress made in Newfoundland’s first 15 years as a part of Canada. The collection provided “a reasonably reliable series of impressions of various facets of Newfoundland’s development” up to that point in time.²⁰ Premier Smallwood, who praised the progress and development the province had made since Confederation, penned the Foreword. While Smallwood’s perspective is heavily biased towards highlighting successful

modernization and improvement efforts on the part of the provincial government, his words provide some overview of what had been achieved, such as the plans for continued economic growth and development for the province with construction of the Churchill Falls hydroelectric project set to begin that year. The collection of papers was divided into three sections that the provincial government saw would best showcase the progress made thus far, though without proper discussion of the potential downsides of such efforts. The first section, "The Land and the People," provides a short introduction, and is followed by a section on the province's government, including several pieces focused on improvements in education. The third and final section, "The Economy," is particularly lengthy. The section pertains to the development of various industries in the province from forestry and mining to fisheries and tourism, as well as developments in electric power, transportation, and communications. Not surprisingly, this commissioned text supports the idea that Newfoundland was doing considerably better since joining Canada. However, elements in the text show how this process was not as straightforward as the provincial government would idealize.

An informative albeit rather short piece, "Social Changes since Confederation," by the director of Extension Services at Memorial University, S.J. Coleman, addressed the development of telecommunications and transportation in the province. He claimed that many Newfoundlanders were still choosing to live in the "traditional ways of their forefathers." Coleman also highlighted what continued to be recognized throughout the post-Confederation period: Newfoundland's high unemployment rate. He discussed how technological developments had provided "modern conveniences" as opposed to the hard labour of the past. Coleman placed this development in contrast to the loss of local arts, crafts, and ways of life, such as textile production. Concerning this societal shift, he described Newfoundlanders as "mentally breaking out" from the "isolation of outport society." Coleman also addressed the migration of Newfoundlanders to other areas of the country in a way that can be described as "foreign," by the use of

such phrasing as “in Canada,” with Newfoundlanders feeling as though they were sojourning to a land altogether different from the one they knew and belonged to.²¹ The reference to their cultural loss and the foreignness of the country of which they were now a part suggests a less than idealized process of post-Confederation life in Newfoundland. While many if not most in the province were happy to progress economically and otherwise, cultural loss and feeling set apart from the rest of Canada were problems that appeared early in the post-Confederation period and remained.

On 31 December 1969, the *Daily News* looked back over the 20 years since Confederation. It acknowledged how Newfoundland had political and financial problems prior to union with Canada and that, since Confederation, the province had made considerable progress in the economy and had experienced notable population growth. The migration of Newfoundlanders to other parts of Canada was mentioned, as was the need for more jobs in the province as this was a key factor in the province’s out-migration patterns. The Smallwood government’s notion of “develop or perish” was discussed and illustrated by the following assertion: “We Newfoundlanders must never be obsessed with the proposition that we are the only part of Canada to progress. Of course we progressed — as did all Canada, and most of the World, for that matter. But, as has been said before, we in Newfoundland had farther to go along the road to progress than did the rest of Canada, if we were to ‘catch up.’ And we have not caught up, as yet.”²² The government-led push for continued modernization at all costs was not over and had much further to go, despite the many years of relocation programs and the like.

In the late 1960s, the Institute of Social and Economic Research at Memorial University published two studies of the ongoing resettlement program. In 1968, Noel Iverson and D. Ralph Matthews’s socio-economic study, *Communities in Decline*, sought to find solutions for improving the program “aimed at providing a better life and a better future for more Newfoundlanders” by moving people into a modern way of life with a “long term economic goal” of turning the “peasant,

subsistence-level society into a market-oriented, industrial one.” They state that “almost no one disagreed with the idea of resettlement *per se*” but that there were some reservations about “certain aspects of the program,” and despite the program’s insistence on a “willingness to move” many in these communities felt “coerced” into doing so. As well, they found that many of those affected had “little or no grasp” of the logistics of the program, as the program’s documentation was not considered by Iverson and Matthews to be a “wholly effective means of communicating the complexities of Household Resettlement to semi-literate outporters.”²³

Anthropologist Cato Wadel’s 1969 study of the resettlement program primarily focused on the change in the economic systems in Newfoundland, from the credit system to the mercantile system and to a modern market-oriented economy. Wadel considered the effect this change had on households and communities in respect of the program that aimed to modernize the province’s economic system. In studying how households and communities adapted to the shifting economic systems, Wadel observed that people felt forced into taking part in the resettlement program, as it was believed to be the “only apparent plan for rural development in Newfoundland.” His study found that “simultaneous urban and rural development” was needed and that the outport economies needed revitalization. He stressed that government paternalism, by way of Confederation, had brought many positive things to Newfoundland, but that this “also brought a basic insecurity to a large [proportion] of the population, and indeed the section of the population that most strongly supported the entry into Confederation has suffered the most from Confederation.” Wadel concluded that this insecurity was not just economic; it was “about total social status manifested in the steady loss of one’s control of the social and economic environment, and the increasing dependence on the good-will of the Governments.”²⁴ These paternalistic measures from both the provincial and federal governments were in effect altering how Newfoundlanders thought about themselves, changing their ways of life, and shifting their cultural identity.

While neither Iverson and Matthews's nor Wadel's study mentions the potential for cultural loss as a consequence of the resettlement programs, this does not mean it was not a consequence for those who were relocated in urbanized growth poles. These programs and the modernization they represent occurred in the same moment that the cultural revival began to emerge. Surely this is not coincidental, as it was those in the outports who were being uprooted from their way of life and consequently at risk of losing their cultural heritage through relocation. This leaves the cultural revival to be seen as an element of resistance to forced modernization. As such, the cultural revival was an attempt by Newfoundlanders to hold on to their culture when they were losing the more tangible elements of who they were as a people — their outport way of life.

The Post-Confederation Surge in Newfoundland Cultural Nationalism

While the cultural revival was at least in part the embodied reaction to the provincial government's intensified program of modernization in Newfoundland's early post-Confederation period, its beginnings are also directly connected to the academic work being done during the same era. The cultural revival movement underway by the mid-1960s, which sought to preserve a traditional Newfoundland culture in an effort to avoid fully assimilating in the Canadian ways of life, had a core component grounded in the scholarly work on Newfoundland that was produced during the period. As such, researchers at Memorial University played a pivotal role in the province's cultural revival. In addition to the deluge of more familiar cultural materials (such as Newfoundland folk music) produced during the cultural revival, the work of academics in Newfoundland was pervasive throughout the cultural revival and comprised a key area of the revival itself. The work that many academics in the humanities and social sciences at Memorial University undertook during the ardent program of Newfoundland Studies that began in the 1950s, and extended well into the

1980s, was part of this movement and helped to establish the cultural revival more formally.

In *Observing the Outports*, historian Jeff Webb chronicled the work of academics engaged in the Newfoundland Studies research program from the 1950s until the 1980s. Webb's work provides a thorough investigation into the efforts of several prominent academics at Memorial University when the academic exploration of Newfoundland became the stronghold of the province's only university. The work of academics from departments such as Folklore, Anthropology, Sociology, Geography, and History at Memorial University sought to thoroughly examine and preserve Newfoundland culture. At the same time, this research inadvertently aided in the cultural revival. Webb suggests that the ideological underpinnings of the Newfoundland Studies movement, and the cultural revival more generally, were "part of a broader cultural reaction to a loss of nationhood and modernization that included a folk music revival, efforts to preserve built heritage, the growth of an indigenous collective theatre, and the emergence of a visual arts scene." This proves to be true, as the generation pushing this movement forward had, for the most part, grown up under Smallwood and were reacting against the provincial government's long-term modernization efforts and the effect such efforts had on the province's culture and identity. Webb notes that throughout the twentieth century, urbanization was occurring globally and Newfoundland, too, was attempting to urbanize and industrialize at an accelerated pace to catch up with the country it had joined. During this period in particular, Newfoundland was in the process of adjusting to "being part of Canada after more than a century of being [a] self-governing colony of the British Empire," with both processes leaving the cultural identity of those on the island in a state of flux.²⁵ That a cultural revival occurred during this time indicates that the new province did indeed find itself in a state of self-evaluation, attempting to redefine itself and its place in Canada.

Romanticism played a key role in the cultural renaissance. Discussing Farley Mowat and his contribution to the cultural revival in Newfoundland, sociologist James Overton highlights the romanticism

that was tied up in this movement, as Mowat believed he had “found a place and a people who seemed to him almost untouched by the modern world — an ideal base from which he would lead the revolutionary struggle to stem the tide of creeping Americanism.” Whether romanticizing the culture or the readiness of the island as a place to launch a cultural revolution, the movement was “part of a broader social response to economic and cultural change” in the post-Confederation period. Those who had grown up in this period had “their knowledge of Newfoundland culture shaped by the cultural renaissance and the Newfoundland studies movement.” And as Webb argues, they “were the people to turn against Smallwood’s hold on power” and embrace a romanticized past as opposed to the troubled program of intensified modernization.²⁶

One research endeavour of the Newfoundland Studies program at Memorial University that particularly reflects the importance and influence of the contribution of the academic work to the cultural revival is the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English*. From the combined efforts of George Story, W.J. Kirwin, and J.D.A. Widdowson, the dictionary was published in 1982 after having been begun more than 20 years earlier by members of Memorial University’s English Department to study the languages, names, and folklore of Newfoundland, as there had been no previous “critical scholarship” on such matters.²⁷ The dictionary has been described as the “most prominent effort at the university to preserve oral culture” and Webb argues that during the period the “awareness that the [*Dictionary of Newfoundland English*] was being compiled was itself a spark for the cultural revival.”²⁸ In the 31 March 1979 special edition of *Weekend Magazine*, Adrian Fowler published an article on the then forthcoming *Dictionary of Newfoundland English*, discussing the “distinctiveness of Newfoundland speech” and the scholars at Memorial who were compiling it. The publication was described, for the Newfoundland population, as “an index of the absorbing regional culture.”²⁹ Those compiling the dictionary used a variety of source material, ranging from the over 200 years of printed material in the province to their fieldwork of conducting and recording

oral interviews across the island. Their motive was to “establish the lexical record for Newfoundlanders themselves and their descendants, and for readers and scholars who need to know about the speech and material culture of the region . . . about the planting, survival and adaptation of a small group of English-speakers overseas.” It focused on words that originated, acquired a different meaning, or were more frequently used in Newfoundland, thus capturing the regional use of the English language, and was “presented as a regional parallel” to the *Dictionary of Canadianisms* (1967) and the *Dictionary of Jamaican English* (1967). The work also explored the particular “phonetic varieties of Newfoundland speech,” which has continued to be an important area of work for Memorial’s English and Linguistics departments.³⁰

Regarding the study of Newfoundlander identity in particular, John Calhoun’s 1970 doctoral thesis, “The National Identity of Newfoundlanders,” sought to find which community Newfoundlanders “identify or feel they belong to as a nation.”³¹ Calhoun proposed four communities: Newfoundland, Canada, Great Britain, and the United States, each with its own “potential national identities that Newfoundland could assume.” These four communities cover the “regional, federal, imperial, and continental” possibilities for the Newfoundland identity and Calhoun reasoned that these identities can be layered. To determine national identity, he considered the “common and distinctive characteristics of Newfoundland” to be historical development, geographical contiguity, language, culture, religion, and racial consciousness. He discussed communications, migration, voter participation, and military recruitment as indicators of national identity because of his belief that an “individual’s perceptions of the community and his commitment to the community” are the true indicators of national identity. Calhoun analyzed the “beliefs and attitudes” of Newfoundlanders through interviews with members of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, as well as students at Memorial University and their parents.³² Even with his limited focus and selective sample population, Calhoun determined that “the physical isolation, the religious divisions, the regional divisions, the

economic division, and the feeling of being a race apart all contributed to the development of a Newfoundland national identity.”³³ He further reasoned that Newfoundlanders “through their historical traditions identify with Newfoundland” and that history itself is a “divisive factor in Newfoundland–Canada relations and history has inhibited the development of an identity with Canada.” The common and distinctive characteristics of physical isolation, a common language, racial notions of separateness and distinctness, as well as cultural factors like dress, food, customs, and habits, had created “this feeling of separateness or distinctiveness” that enabled the continuation of a divergent identity in the province.³⁴

The perception of the threat of Americanization was a concern for both Canada and Newfoundland during the mid-twentieth century. Regarding this, Calhoun asserts that both Newfoundland and Canada “have accepted the American mass culture and there is a subsequent loss of a peculiar or distinctive Newfoundland or Canadian culture.”³⁵ Calhoun’s analysis of newspapers and migration and voting patterns points to “a joint identity with Canada and Newfoundland, as well as a national identity in transition.”³⁶ In relation to Newfoundland versus Canadian identification specifically, his interviews revealed that older generations primarily considered themselves Newfoundlanders and younger generations felt they were Canadians, largely due to the creation of Canadian symbols such as the flag during their lifetime; Calhoun saw this as further evidence for a transitioning national identity in the post-Confederation period.³⁷ As well, he rightly did not ignore the cleavages within Newfoundland. He noted that “most Newfoundlanders interviewed perceive that there are differences between themselves and other Newfoundlanders,” speaking to the “town–bay” divide within the province that had become heightened since Confederation due to the significant regional difference in voting during the 1948 referendums.³⁸ Calhoun concluded with the argument that Newfoundland’s identity “is in a state of transition” and that the national identity of Newfoundlanders has been “undergoing a major transformation since confederation.”³⁹

Even with his selective sample population, Calhoun's conclusion of Newfoundland's identity existing in a state of transition during its post-Confederation era is readily convincing, given the mixed opinions on such matters across the entirety of the post-Confederation period.

Throughout the period of the cultural revival, the movement itself was often a point of discussion on campus. In 1984, Newfoundland philosopher F.L. Jackson published a polemical take on Newfoundland culture since Confederation entitled *Newfoundland in Canada: A People in Search of a Polity*. In this work, he stressed that Newfoundlanders needed to define their cultural identity in their own terms in order to survive as a culture. Jackson's definition of culture included the notion of "life itself in its most earthy, everyday, practical, human reality." As such, if Newfoundlanders wanted their culture to survive they needed "to define humanity in their own terms, in their own homes, in their own rocky bays, engaged at work they know and love, and not [be] forced to become uni-dimensional Canadians."⁴⁰ Thus, it follows that if Newfoundlanders could choose for themselves how they live their lives and how to be part of Canada, then they should have no reason to fear the loss of their cultural identity. However, in the province's early post-Confederation period Newfoundlanders felt the need to push back against modernizing measures brought in by the Smallwood government that sought to alter those cultural traditions and their way of life.

In April 1985, a conference on cultural identity was held in St. John's. The provincial government conference largely focused on the development of multiculturalism, both within the province and in the whole of Canada. Considering the recent decades having been so focused on the cultural revival within the province, F.L. Jackson's presentation addressed Newfoundland cultural identity, specifically the "problems Newfoundlanders have as an identified culture and the problems that come with the realization that [they] have a culture." He described the enthusiasm towards Newfoundland culture as a "fairly recent thing" that began in the mid-1960s when the island was modernizing and academics were rushing to witness the "authentic" outport

culture. He also spoke to the negatives that accompany “promoting the idea that to be a Newfoundlander is something extraordinary,” as those who promote this cultural nostalgia essentially want to preserve Newfoundland culture and prevent it from naturally evolving. Jackson furthered this view by warning against those who “use cultural preservation for self serving gain,” whether as entertainment or for political advantage, which it could be argued the Progressive Conservative Party had been doing for some time during the cultural revival.⁴¹

Webb has commented that Jackson “thought foreign-born academics romanticized Newfoundland culture” and that Jackson saw these academics as contributing to the creation of a “Newf-cult,” which “bore little resemblance to the real culture” of Newfoundlanders.⁴² Jackson was indeed critical of the movement he bore witness to, proclaiming that “a good deal of the heritage-mongering in Newfoundland in recent years is nothing more than the local manifestation of a resurgence of nationalistic nostalgia that has swept the whole of contemporary society. It had the defect that it remains aloof, holed up in a romanticized past, from the realities of modern life.”⁴³ It was not that Jackson did not see a cultural renaissance occurring — he observed that there indeed was — but he was more concerned with its portrayal and relative inaccuracies due to such focused attention on an idealized past as opposed to the natural growth of a culture and identity. Jackson even questioned whether Newfoundlanders could survive the cultural shift of becoming part of Canada if they remained so backward-looking by romanticizing the pre-Confederation era. For Jackson, the “conservation of Newfoundland’s cultural heritage is thus only really possible if there is also a conservation of Newfoundland’s political integrity and autonomy,” signifying that Newfoundland needed to carve out its own self-reliant place within Canada in order to move forward in its cultural identity as opposed to continuing to look backward.⁴⁴

Academics in the province were not the only individuals observing the cultural revival. Newspapers from across Canada had been commenting on the movement and Newfoundland’s distinctive identity

since at least the early 1960s. In January 1960, the *Peterborough Examiner* in Ontario featured an article pertaining to Newfoundlanders who had migrated to other areas of Canada before Confederation and were interviewed regarding their views of the relationship between Newfoundland and Canada. While Newfoundland had only been a Canadian province for just over a decade at this point, Newfoundlanders had been making a go of it in Canada for far longer. Edward Crawford, a Winnipeg lawyer and former resident of Newfoundland, surmised that “mere constitutional change” had not made “Newfoundlanders into everyday Canadians.” Crawford went on to say, “whether there is a social union with Canada is doubtful . . . Newfoundland is entirely different from the rest of Canada. I was down there last September. There is no outward expression of interest in Canada. They live their own lives.” Dr. H.E. Taylor, who left St. John’s in 1931 and was currently residing in Vancouver, professed: “my own belief is that Newfoundlanders have a character different from that of many Canadians.”⁴⁵

Later, in April 1971, the *Medicine Hat News* in Alberta had an article referring to “a bit of a quiet revolution” that had been occurring in the province during the “last few years.” While discussing the Newfoundland government’s promotion of rural and regional development initiatives, the editorial also addressed the province’s cultural initiatives. It described workshops for tourists held through the vocational training divisions of Memorial University’s Department of Education that featured crafts such as “weaving, leathercraft and rughooking” and noted that “cod-jigging ventures, boat rides and saltwater swimming” were being offered for tourists to take part in “traditional” Newfoundland culture.⁴⁶ When the government could see an opportunity to create revenue from the culture and ways of life it was set to move away from, it chose to embrace the past and market it accordingly.

Most notably, journalist Sandra Gwyn’s 1976 article, “The Newfoundland Renaissance,” brought the revival of Newfoundland’s high culture to Canada’s attention. Focusing on the vibrant arts scene, Gwyn described Newfoundland as “a society turned in upon itself and threatened from outside” that was currently “undergoing the agony

and ecstasy of a revolution.” She indicated that Memorial University was a key player, the “crossroads and command post” for the “cultural renaissance.”⁴⁷ Referring to Gwyn’s article, Webb explains that she “pointed to the birth of politically engaged, collectively written theatre,” mentioning groups such as the comedic troupe CODCO, “the fusion of traditional music with popular music,” with the band Figgy Duff serving as an example, and the “burgeoning number of painters and artists, such as Christopher Pratt and Gerald Squires.” Webb argues that these developments were in part a reaction to the previous generation’s “embrace of American popular culture,” where a new generation sought to make a “new popular culture out of the Newfoundland folk culture.”⁴⁸ The out-of-province commentary on the movement illustrates how the cultural revival was seen outside of the microcosm of Newfoundland, often furthering the romanticized notions of the province’s folkways and outport lifestyle.

In addition to the academic works, fine arts, and commentary, the cultural revival spread further afield. Beginning in 1964, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) launched its now longest running regional program, *Land & Sea*. The weekly televised program based in Newfoundland (in 1971 a Halifax-based version was introduced as well) focuses on the more traditional aspects of Newfoundland and outport life — such as the fisheries, arts and crafts, food-ways, and folklore — and provides an abundance of documented evidence of both traditional culture and its variance and modernization (or lack thereof). The existence of this program speaks to the desire of Newfoundlanders to cultivate and promote aspects of their cultural heritage but also to educate the younger and future generations whose only experience of Newfoundland would be as a province of Canada. The 30-minute show continues to this day, though it suffered a brief cancellation in 1990 due to federal cutbacks at the CBC that produced “public outcry.”⁴⁹ Since its return in 1992, *Land & Sea* has remained relatively popular among viewers in the province, demonstrating their continued appreciation of their heritage and tradition of rural life and culture. That the program exists at all, let alone on Canada’s national

television network, demonstrates the consideration given to traditional Newfoundland culture by those who make and consume it, as well as it being an example of the cultural revival that began at the time of its original launch.

Newfoundland's cultural renaissance proved to be impressionable to other Canadian artists as well. Canadian pianist Glenn Gould produced a collection of radio documentaries for the CBC from 1967 to 1977 entitled the *Solitude Trilogy*. In 1964, the CBC had sought out Gould to inquire if he would contribute to Canada's centennial special programming. At that time, Gould already had the *Solitude Trilogy* in mind. As a national celebrity, Gould was given latitude to produce a celebratory project that highlighted aspects of Canada's culture and heritage. The first part of the trilogy, *The Idea of North* (1967), addressed views of northern Canada and the last part, *The Quiet in the Land* (1977), presented a view of the life of a Mennonite community in Red River, Manitoba, dealing with contemporary society. Of interest here is the second part, *The Latecomers* (1969), which addressed life in out-port Newfoundland and the ongoing resettlement program. *The Latecomers* addressed Newfoundland's "physical and cultural isolation" and the object of the documentary was "to present the voices of an island isolated physically, geographically, and culturally from mainland urban culture and society." The radio documentary opens with sounds of waves crashing that continue during the interviews with Newfoundlanders describing their traditional ways of life. Particular buzzwords and concepts frequently mentioned are "isolation," "codfish," "self-sufficiency," "comfort," and the notion of work as being "one's duty." Several of those interviewed spoke of the perceived broken promises of Confederation and the difficulties that continued in its aftermath, such as underdevelopment and the resentment it had caused. One participant, referring to the increased government assistance by way of welfare cheques, despairingly proclaimed, "the spirit of Newfoundland has died."⁵⁰ Such strongly worded sentiments expressed by Newfoundlanders in this period exhibit feelings of loss — their culture, their independence, their ways of life — and of alienation from the

country they had joined. While Gould's intention is uncertain, the documentary provided an outlet for the expression of some Newfoundlanders' feelings of desolation, separation, and downright *otherness*, which would be heard on a national scale.

A Strengthened Newfoundlander Identity in Canada's Newest Province

The cultural revival played a role in why Newfoundlander identity held fast and even strengthened in its post-Confederation period, as did the shifting perceptions of Confederation within the province. Since the union of Newfoundland and Canada, many editorials and opinion pieces have been written, and survey studies conducted, addressing Newfoundlanders' attitudes towards Confederation and its consequences. Initially, the general attitude favoured the union as beneficial for Newfoundland, but over time it became a scapegoat for many of the socio-economic problems in the province; and the romanticization of the cultural revival intensified this sentiment. Newspapers across the province and the country show that union with Canada remained a recurrent topic in Newfoundland's post-Confederation period, and the consistent discussion of this contentious point in Newfoundland's history affected how those in Canada's newest province identified themselves.

Opinion on Confederation went through an evolution in its aftermath. In July 1967, an *Evening Telegram* article discussed the "bitter and ugly affair" of the battle over Confederation but when the family allowance cheques started coming in people gave up the fight and "within a few years the anti-confederates had shrunk to a handful." Yet, the provincial Progressive Conservative Party was described as having "carried the anti-Confederate stigma with it ever since and has never managed to elect more than a corporal's guard to the legislature."⁵¹ While much anti-Confederate sentiment had been expressed early on, by the late 1960s it was seen as something of the past due to the improved standard of living from the federal financial support directly

flowing into the homes of Newfoundlanders, thus shifting their attitudes towards favouring Confederation. However, in a 1979 letter to the editor of the *Evening Telegram*, there was a noted shift in tone. W.J. Burse, originally from the fishing community of Bay de Verde but then living in St. John's, expressed frequently refrained nostalgia for the *old* Newfoundland, writing "there were lots of good things before confederation."⁵² This line of thinking speaks to the romanticized narrative that was increasingly pushed throughout the cultural revival.

The anniversaries of Newfoundland's joining Canada brought increased public discussion of the event. In a piece from the *Globe and Mail* on 31 March 1989, the fortieth anniversary, Don Nichol, an English professor at Memorial University, discussed the ups and downs for the province since Confederation and commented that "at a time of transition, doubt and promise, Newfoundland completes the curious symmetry of Canada."⁵³ On 1 April 1989, the *Evening Telegram* discussed memories of the Confederation battle of some who were there, including Smallwood, as well as some of those who opposed. The paper noted that opposition still existed 40 years on. In the piece, Smallwood stressed that "Newfoundland's commitment to confederation is stronger and getting even stronger. Where would we be without 50 percent of our [provincial] revenue coming from Ottawa?"⁵⁴ Two months later, on 2 June, *The Evening Telegram* published another piece further discussing how even 40 years after the fact there were still anti-Confederates, showcasing an interview with anti-Confederation advocate Jim White, who felt that Newfoundland should have had an economic union with the United States rather than joining with Canada.⁵⁵ These various pieces demonstrate the contention of the union between Newfoundland and Canada decades later, and this lingering debate played a role in how Newfoundlanders saw themselves and their province in Canada.

In addition to newspapers, survey's evidence the views of those in the province in a more measurable way. In 1979, a "Special Survey of Newfoundlanders' Attitudes towards Confederation with Canada" was conducted to "explore attitudes of Newfoundland's adult population

towards confederation with Canada, on the 30th anniversary of Newfoundland's entry into confederation." *Weekend Magazine* commissioned the survey for an editorial feature of their 31 March 1979 publication.⁵⁶ In January 1979, Data Laboratories Research Consultants in Montreal developed the questionnaire and began telephone interviews with 505 randomly selected adults living in Newfoundland and Labrador. The respondents were believed to be representative of the province's population and the questionnaire gathered opinions concerning self-identification and their feelings about Confederation.⁵⁷

The leading question asked whether Newfoundlanders considered themselves Canadians or Newfoundlanders; the responses favoured Newfoundland, with 64.9 per cent considering themselves Newfoundlanders "first and foremost" and 34.2 per cent considering themselves Canadians "first and foremost."⁵⁸ The survey asked whether or not respondents would vote to join Canada if Newfoundland had not already done so, with the results showing an overwhelming response for joining Canada, at 90.2 per cent. Respondents were also asked how they would vote in the case of a referendum on separation from Canada, with another overwhelming majority — 90.9 per cent — favouring remaining in Canada.⁵⁹ This response rate indicates that while identifying strongly with their province, most Newfoundlanders saw the benefits of being part of Canada even if they were less likely to identify as Canadian. As well, those aged 45 and older were more likely to consider themselves Newfoundlanders first, while those age 35–44 were less likely to vote for Confederation and also less likely to vote to stay in Canada in 1979.⁶⁰ This speaks to the understanding of those who had little or no recollection of pre-Confederation life in Newfoundland and therefore suggests a level of romanticism for that era, based on a belief that it may have offered better socio-economic conditions. Such belief was likely passed down from the generation that lived through the World War II and post-war economic boom in Newfoundland.

Addressing culture directly, the survey asked whether respondents had personally "gained or lost culturally as a result of confederation." The results were mixed, with 49.5 per cent feeling "neither richer nor

poorer culturally since confederation,” 14.9 per cent feeling either “somewhat poorer” or “much poorer,” and 34 per cent feeling either “much richer” or “somewhat richer,” which was likely due to the ongoing cultural revival at that time. Pertaining to the province rather than the personal, it was asked whether Newfoundland had “lost some of its cultural traditions since confederation.” Again, responses were mixed, with 17 per cent describing “severe losses in cultural traditions,” 39.1 per cent reporting “some losses,” and 42.5 per cent feeling “no losses at all.”⁶¹ The youngest respondents were most likely to feel personally somewhat poorer culturally since Confederation, giving an indication of why the cultural revival occurred when it did.⁶² As well, the survey also asked participants where in Canada they would like to live, with 80 per cent choosing Newfoundland.⁶³ Despite any socio-economic hardships that Newfoundlanders felt, most respondents still preferred a life in Newfoundland compared to the possibility of life in another province.

Using the commissioned survey data, on the province’s thirtieth anniversary of Confederation, *Weekend Magazine* published a special issue focused on the island province with the cover showcasing a father and son pair of fishermen in an outport community and, inside, large red coloured lettering declaring: “90% of Newfoundlanders are glad they joined Canada.” This special issue appeared in the St. John’s *Evening Telegram*, among other major newspapers across the country. The feature article looks back at Confederation and claims that when Newfoundland joined Canada “it did so reluctantly, for it has long had its own identity.” This piece highlighted that 65 per cent of surveyed Newfoundlanders considered themselves Newfoundlanders first and Canadians second and that 56 per cent of those asked felt at least some loss of cultural traditions since joining Canada; however, 63 per cent felt this cultural loss was not because of Confederation. Smallwood, the former premier of Newfoundland and “Father of Confederation,” was quoted stating, “There’s an emerging nationalism here, a passionate Newfoundland patriotism. I’m surprised that there’s anyone in Newfoundland who considers himself a Canadian first.” As

Smallwood was rather nationalistic, this statement is not particularly surprising, especially considering that it was during the height of the ongoing cultural revival.⁶⁴

In the *Weekend Magazine* special edition, a biographical article by noted Newfoundland author Al Pittman, “The Day I became Canadian,” reminisced about 1 April 1949, when the then eight-year-old learned that while he was a Newfoundlander the day before, today he was Canadian. Pittman discussed that he later learned of both the protests and celebrations regarding the event, but remarked that people in his community that morning did not seem to be aware that anything had changed, that they were no longer just in Newfoundland but now also in Canada. Pittman describes Canada as “a most foreign place” to Newfoundlanders prior to 1949 and in the immediate post-Confederation period he reasoned that Newfoundlanders “got used to thinking of Toronto [rather than Boston] as the new mecca, and in time we got used to Canadian money, Canadian stamps, Canadian cigarettes and candy and the rest . . . but it took many of us a lot longer to get used to being Canadians.” He further remarked that many still think of themselves as Newfoundlanders. The reminiscence continues with commentary from Adrian Fowler of Corner Brook (who was three at the time of Confederation). Fowler told the Task Force on Canadian Unity in 1977, “I have feelings of intimacy for Newfoundland that I can never have for Canada, which by comparison is an abstraction and claims my allegiance only by law. I am a Newfoundlander first, Canadian a very distant second.” Pittman discussed that during the 1950s and 1960s there was “an anxious urge to emulate ‘the mainland’,” as Newfoundlanders had poor opinions of themselves during the immediate post-Confederation period, seeing themselves as “an inferior people exiled by history to live inferior lives on an ugly rock in the Atlantic Ocean. They rejected their own music, their dances, their speech, their occupations, their customs, their history and their heritage.” However, by the 1970s there had been a reversal in that trend of rejecting their culture with a turn to presenting the “proud Newfoundlander” and fully engaging in the ongoing cultural

revival, with Pittman expressing that “suddenly we became part of a country we hardly knew, and just as suddenly the government exhorted the people to abandon their old ways and adopt the new,” but the people of Newfoundland had long grown tired of this message.⁶⁵

Moving out of the province and into topics related to the cultural milieu that affected wider Canada, two articles in the edition of *Week-end Magazine* addressed aspects of out-migration and the fishery. Harold Horwood’s article addressed how more than 50,000 Newfoundlanders had migrated to Toronto in the 30 years since Confederation and discussed how these migrants “comprise[d] one of the city’s most distinctive minorities,” illustrating how they still engage with their traditional culture by preparing and eating Newfoundland dishes and singing outport folksongs. This piece provides evidence of how Newfoundlanders in the rest of Canada, like other minority cultural and/or national groups throughout the country, sought to protect and continue their culture, poignantly keeping their culture alive during a time when back home it had been simultaneously eroded by provincial government-backed modernization and consequently reinvigorated by the cultural revival.⁶⁶ Patrick O’Flaherty covered the issue of the seal hunt and the related animal rights movement in relation to how this was affecting the Canadian economy and fishery regulations. O’Flaherty stated, “I don’t want to give you the impression that we want to break our union with Canada. On the contrary. After three decades as Canadians, Newfoundlanders have formed an attachment to this great country, and the next 30 years may we see the province take its place as a full partner within confederation. But not this. Our destiny is not to become assimilated into some melting pot.”⁶⁷ This statement effectively demonstrates the position that while Newfoundlanders in general were content with being part of and working with Canada, they were not willing to part with their culture and tradition in order to do so.

Opinions and attitudes about Confederation and post-Confederation matters provide some evidence of Newfoundlanders’ understandings of themselves in relation to Canada. As well, provincial and federal election results provide a measure of the general attitudes

towards each level of government, which also contribute to our understanding of Newfoundlanders' political consciousness at that time. Between 1979 and 1982 several studies in the province regarding elections surveyed voter opinions not only on topical political and electoral matters, but also on how they identified — as Newfoundlanders, as Canadians, or both.

In the spring of 1979, back-to-back federal and provincial elections in Newfoundland were followed by yet another federal election early in 1980. Memorial University's Department of Political Science, in conjunction with the Institute of Social and Economic Research, used these elections to study voter attitudes province-wide. Approximately 6,500 questionnaires were mailed to selected participants from the provincial voter list in July 1979, with the results tabulated from the 835 participants who answered both surveys. The sample was believed to be relatively reflective of the population of Newfoundland, an exception being the "proportion of respondents with post-secondary education exceed[ing] the provincial average." The results of the surveys were "considered to represent accurately the views of all voters" in the province. "[M]easures of interest [in elections were] substantially lower for the federal campaign," and voters showed more concern about provincial matters during federal elections, which "support[ed] the proposition that Newfoundlanders are most concerned about the provincial political arena."⁶⁸

In 1982, Memorial University political scientist Mark Grasser conducted another survey study after the outcome of the 1982 provincial election. Those who participated in this survey were also participants in the 1979 and 1980 survey studies. The central concerns were twofold: first, discovering if Premier Peckford's "mandate" on the offshore oil dispute was the reason for the Progressive Conservative election victory; second, discerning whether there was "a mood of 'nationalism' among Newfoundlanders, and if so, what were its dimensions and proportions." With this secondary focus, the survey addressed questions pertaining to federal-provincial relations and Newfoundland nationalism due to "assertions of Newfoundland rights

and priorities in constitutional and economic spheres” at that time. While there was support for the federal government, others felt differently. Nineteen per cent agreed with the statement “Newfoundland should separate” if that is what is needed to “gain control of its resources,” and 52 per cent believed the federal government “is more interested in what they can get out of [Newfoundland] than in how to help [the province] develop.”⁶⁹

Interestingly, a direct question pertaining to Newfoundland versus Canadian identity asked participants how they think of themselves in regard to both identities. The results reflect considerable identification with Newfoundland, with 99 per cent of the respondents including it in their response, but the breakdown is more telling. Those who considered themselves “a Newfoundlander only” totalled 8 per cent, “a Newfoundlander first, then a Canadian” received 42 per cent, and “a Newfoundlander and Canadian equally” had a plurality at 43 per cent. Only 7 per cent considered themselves “a Canadian first, then a Newfoundlander” and the remaining 1 per cent saw themselves as “Canadian only.” This is quite demonstrative of Newfoundlanders holding a dominant Newfoundland identity across the population, but also indicates that most were adopting a Canadian identity alongside — either considering it equal to their Newfoundland identity or at least significant enough to consider placing it within their defined identity, next in line to being a Newfoundlander. As well, a section of the survey addressed the particular notion of “Newfoundland distinctiveness.” Of those who participated, 53 per cent believed that “only a Newfoundlander” could understand their problems and 95 per cent saw studying “Newfoundland culture and way of life” as something that “should be required” in high school education.⁷⁰ While having adjusted to the reality of being Canadian in the 1980s, Newfoundlanders still held on to their distinctive identity and continued to place considerable importance on maintaining that identity.

In 1979, sociologist James Overton argued that the occurrence of an increased nationalism in Newfoundland was part of the post-war climate of anti-colonial movements, combined with the more

direct reaction to the increased economic development in the post-Confederation period, which saw a process of “rapid integration into the Canadian economic and political systems” under the Smallwood governments. When the increasing development in the province was not as successful or as evenly distributed as had been hoped by the people of Newfoundland, it led to the questioning of Confederation and the process of development itself. This development, including the resettlement programs in isolated fishing communities, began to be seen as a process of modernization that was hindering Newfoundlander’s culture, heritage, and values. Consequently, there was a “renewal of interest in rural life and folk culture (art, music, customs, crafts, theatre, speech) and local history,” with most of this revival of “local culture [being] directed by, and intended for, the consumption of the new urban middle class, a class which — paradoxically — was created by the very process of modernisation that has been (and is) regarded as a threat to the traditional culture.” While writing in the midst of the cultural revival, Overton tied the movement to a rising neo-nationalism in the period and an embrace of cultural stereotypes, such as the “distinctive breed” of the “hardy Newfoundlander,” intended to create and reinforce attachment to their national identity.⁷¹

This attachment was often tied to the particular notion of Newfoundland’s feelings of inferiority within Canada. Joan Sullivan, in her 2018 publication *Game*, has investigated this further, covering the 1974 finale of the popular televised high-school team game show, *Reach for the Top*, where, for the first time, the winning team was from Newfoundland. The team from Gonzaga High School in St. John’s became a newsworthy item back home in the province and their win on the national stage was a moment of pride for those in Newfoundland, proving that they were every bit as good as the rest of Canada.⁷²

Such feelings of inferiority were a significant factor in creating such intense attachment to Newfoundland cultural identity during the revival. In 1982, folksinger-songwriter Bruce Moss first wrote and recorded his solo album *The Islander*, which included the popular anthem “The Islander.” The lyrics speak of an individual with considerable

pride in and intense loyalty to Newfoundland, with such exaltations as the song's chorus: "I'm a Newfoundlander born and bred / And I'll be one 'til I die / I'm proud to be an Islander / And here's the reason why / I'm free as the wind / And the waves that wash the sand / There's no place I would rather be / Than here in Newfoundland." With the same intense loyalty, the song's verses address some of the political hardships the island province has historically dealt with, such as the Labrador boundary dispute with Quebec and the offshore oil dispute with the federal government.⁷³ The devotion to their homeland in the face of many hardships is a recurrent theme throughout much of the romanticized and mythologized cultural production since Confederation.

Writing in 1987, sociologist Harry Hiller spoke of the "intense loyalty" Newfoundlanders have towards their province and how it is "without parallel among English-speaking people in Canada." He indicated two possible origins for this loyalty, the first being the province's previous independence, which he described as being lost under "questionable circumstances" due to the close-call referendum that brought them into Confederation with Canada, and that over time this had been combined with continued episodes of grievance due to underdevelopment. The second possibility was grounded in the "uniqueness" of Newfoundland, compounded by a lack of immigration that led to an insular, concentrated populous of largely home-born Newfoundlanders within the province well into its post-Confederation period. Each of Hiller's possible theories holds considerable water, with both appearing to be part of the rationale behind why Newfoundlanders stalwartly identify as they do. The intensity of Newfoundlanders remaining in their otherness, as a means to cultivate and promote their cultural identity, has also led to using language to further reinforce their distinction. The inextricable link between language and culture, classifying "outsiders as 'Come-From-Aways' (CFA)," labelling those from other parts of Canada as "mainlanders," and the use of "bay-talk" were (and are) a way of demonstrating that you belong in a "one of us" mentality.⁷⁴

Moreover, Hiller was writing in the mid-1980s, when the provincial government was using education as a means to further indoctrinate Newfoundlanders in the knowledge of their traditional culture and heritage. As such, he discussed the role of the intelligentsia in the emergent nationalism of the period, describing it as a “confluence of cultural nationalism with economic nationalism,” with a mandatory “three years of instruction in Newfoundland society and culture in high school.” This was exemplified by the popular “Ode to Newfoundland,” which continued to be “taught in the school system and is sung at all public events, with or without the Canadian national anthem,” all of which further reinforced Newfoundlanders’ differentiation from the rest of Canada. There is also the issue of different national historical narratives that are not accounted for in Canadian history education. Hiller provides the example of the World War I Battle of Beaumont-Hamel as “perhaps the best symbol of the distinctiveness between Newfoundland and Canada,” which highlights why the federal government’s encouragement of Canada Day celebrations in the province “seems strangely disrespectful and somewhat alien” to Newfoundlanders in the post-Confederation era.⁷⁵

Conclusion

On 1 April 2019, the seventieth anniversary of Newfoundland’s union with Canada, the CBC radio talk show *Cross Talk* provided commentary demonstrating that even after 70 years of Newfoundland being a province in Canada Newfoundlanders still typically identify as Newfoundlanders before identifying as Canadians.⁷⁶ This is not surprising, as other provinces with strong provincial identities, such as Quebec, demonstrate a similar pattern.⁷⁷ The reasoning behind this continued regional identification in Newfoundland in the decades after Confederation cuts across several lines of explanation, from contemporary global trends to specified local matters. Much of the post-war period saw increased interest and concern over Canadian identity from the federal government, academics, and the wider Canadian society.

However, in Newfoundland a cultural revival spanned much of this period. The revival began in the mid-1960s and verified a desire for the preservation of a “traditional” Newfoundland culture and the avoidance of becoming fully assimilated Canadians without distinction. Developments in the local arts scenes and within the academic community at Memorial University fostered the revival and the preservation of Newfoundland’s culture. A level of dissatisfaction with Confederation is evident behind this movement, despite an awareness of the socio-economic benefits that union had brought to Newfoundlanders. It remained important for Newfoundlanders to maintain and preserve their unique culture in an attempt to ensure their differentiation from the rest of (English) Canada. However, the portrayal and homogenized ideation of what Newfoundland culture is, and who Newfoundlanders are, are debatable; in a place as varied as Newfoundland and Labrador, both in the past and in the present, there is no uniform Newfoundlander.

By fostering a distinct cultural identity, Newfoundland’s cultural revival was in part a response to the Smallwood government’s pressured modernization to meet Canadian standards, as well as a bulwark against assimilating into the larger spectre of North American continentalism. This revival was encumbered with a romanticized and mythologized notion of the past due to the difficulties of the post-Confederation era.⁷⁸ While the cultural revival began as a more spontaneous movement partially fuelled by academic work being done at Memorial University, the change of government from the long-reigning Smallwood Liberals to the Progressive Conservatives (PCs) in the early 1970s further demonstrated how this was playing out across multiple levels. The PCs utilized this movement, reflecting Newfoundland society, for a host of reasons — from appealing to voters, to using the rising neo-nationalist sentiment as a shield against the federal government. The political realities of the new province and its cultural renaissance are inextricably linked, with the cultural revival not only being a cultural renaissance but a political one as well. As Harry Hiller argues, a “nascent ethnicity” was emerging in Newfoundland during this time

and the “provocateur” of this emergent ethnicity was “the changes in the structure of the society,” with the “most fundamental change [having been] the shift from a small fishing economy to an urban social world.” This rapid modernization pressurized Newfoundland’s cultural identity to manifest into a movement of cultural nationalism in an effort to retain a traditional way of rural life and folk culture that was in direct contrast to the societal change that was occurring.⁷⁹ The Newfoundland government continued to employ and push this rhetoric of nationalism throughout the 1970s and 1980s (and arguably to the present) in an effort to remain distinct from the rest of English Canada.

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Notes

- 1 A statement from an unidentified interviewee from Newfoundland conducted during the summer of 1978 for a report submitted to the Task Force on Canadian Unity. G.A. Rawlyk, ed., *The Atlantic Provinces and the Problems of Confederation: Report to the Task Force on Canadian Unity* (St. John’s: Breakwater Books, 1979), 375.
- 2 Note that I am using “Newfoundland” as opposed to “Newfoundland and Labrador” throughout this paper. The province’s official name was “Newfoundland” until December 2001 when an amendment was made in the Canadian Constitution to officially change the provincial name to “Newfoundland and Labrador.” Given that the period of this project is before 2001, the name Newfoundland will be used almost exclusively.

- 3 Newfoundland Department of Public Works and Services, *Historical Statistics of Newfoundland and Labrador* (St. John's: Division of Printing Services, 1970), 6, 12; Newfoundland Department of Public Works and Services, *Historical Statistics of Newfoundland and Labrador* (St. John's: Division of Printing Services, 1990), 5.
- 4 Miriam Wright, *A Fishery for Modern Times: The State and the Industrialization of the Newfoundland Fishery, 1934–1968* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2001), 7.
- 5 James Overton, "Sparking a Cultural Revolution: Joey Smallwood, Farley Mowat, Harold Horwood and Newfoundland's Cultural Renaissance," *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 16, no. 2 (2000): 167; Harry H. Hiller, "Dependence and Independence: Emergent Nationalism in Newfoundland," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 10, no.3 (1987): 269.
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