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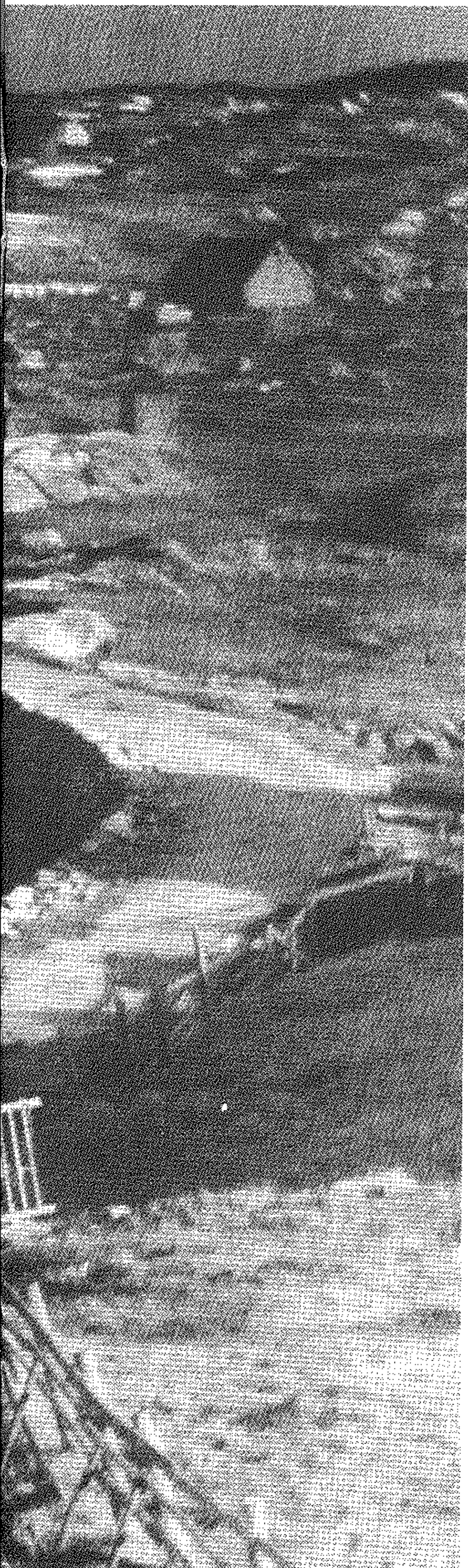

Twilight at Peggy's Cove: Towards a Genealogy of "Maritimicity" in Nova Scotia

Ian McKay

"In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradiction because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves." [1]

As for the past, I will restrict myself to pointing out the paradox under which contemporary society lives in relation to 'tradition,' and by means of which it in fact tends to abolish this tradition. It is a matter of the co-existence of hyper-information with essential ignorance and indifference. The gathering of information and objects, never before practiced to this degree, goes hand in hand with the neutralization of the past: an object of knowledge for some, of tourist curiousity or a hobby for others, the past is a source and root for no one....Neither 'traditionalist,' nor creative and revolutionary (despite the stories it tells on this subject), the epoch lives its relation to the past in a manner which does, as such, represent a historical innovation: of the most perfect exteriority. [2]

The past has become the property of the tourism industry in Nova Scotia. This colonization of the past by capital and the capitalist state in the interests of increasing tourism revenue poses a threat to the honest dialogue between past and present which constitutes the precondition of historicity, a society's ability to determine the order of its representations and to visualize the future.

It is easy simply to deride tourism, far harder to understand or transcend its dominant idioms. We have all enjoyed a knowing laugh at the expense of tourists, uneasily aware as we do so that we are often tourists ourselves. Modern tourism means the triumph of a sort of epistemological relativism—is this a "real" event, we are often made to wonder, or merely a "pseudo-event" for the tourists?—and a totalizing integration of aesthetic and commodity production. It is thus a prime instance of what Fredric Jameson has suggested is the cultural logic of late capitalism. For this logic he reserves Plato's conception of the 'simulacrum'—the identical copy for which no original has ever existed. The "culture of the simulacrum" comes to life, writes Jameson, "in a society where exchange-value has been generalized to the point at which the very memory of use-value is effaced," and the image itself becomes the final form of commodity reification.[3] In the special case of a dependent and underdeveloped region where, for six decades, culture has been commodified in the interests of tourism, a myth of a prelapsarian Golden Age—for which we might (following Barthes) coin a word, "Maritimicity," a peculiar petit-bourgeois rhetoric of lobster pots, grizzled fishermen, wharves and schooners—is both a material and a moral force, both a resource to be appropriated and a powerful idiom shaping local interpretations of Maritime history and landscape.

And therein lies the pathos of Golden Age mythology in a region that has become economically dependent on tourism. A pastoral discourse on the region answers to the ideological needs of a certain kind of Maritime 'nationalist' and to those of a certain kind of tourist. This duality was inscribed in the rhetoric of Maritimicity from the very moment of its birth in the 1920s and 1930s. For this reason, it can never be enough to confront the pervasive simulacra of the pre-industrial folk as mere tourist 'fakes.' What is especially tricky about tourism, as it reshapes and reimagines Maritime history, is that its reading of the region correlates perfectly with the prelapsarian longings of homegrown romantic regionalism, and in this correlation lies the secret of its cultural pervasiveness. This correlation was the product of history: both versions of the politicized pastoral were born in the region's crisis of the 1920s, both were keyed to a new international emphasis on the 'primitive' and the 'natural,' and both required the efforts of urban middle-class people, many of whom in fact worked on both sides of this cultural street.

I will try to explore the peculiar cultural logic of tourism in Nova Scotia by tracing the genealogy of that famous form within the myth of Maritimicity, Peggy's Cove; and I shall suggest parallels between this story, that of the *Bluenose*, and of other recent appropriations of the myth of the Golden Age, which, since the pivotal 1920s, has been the dominant idiom of provincial tourism.

Peggy's Cove: The Invention of Fishing Village

Peggy's Cove is the most unequivocal example of a form invented by modern tourism. That it is now the most famous landscape in the province would have shocked Nova Scotians in the nineteenth century, who did not consider Peggy's Cove beautiful nor most fishermen picturesque. Mere natural beauty (which, anyway, is always socially and historically constructed), or the behaviourist theories that attempt to explore the origins of aesthetic satisfaction in our animal inheritance, or even psycho-analytical theories, cannot meet the challenge of this particular landscape which, over the course of a short twenty years, went from being ugly and sterile to being sublime and inspiring.[4] Any explanation must therefore be based, not on the facts of the Cove's *existence*, but rather on the Cove's *means*. To investigate the moment of its invention will give us valuable clues to the systemic cultural changes which made it possible.

There can be no doubt: the gaze of the nineteenth-century tourist was not drawn to a place like Peggy's. The famous Baedeker guide made no mention of Peggy's Cove in 1907, and neither did locally produced guides.[5] This neglect did not arise from the fact that Peggy's Cove had not yet been "discovered," for it lay within easy striking distance of fashionable coastal resorts. It arose, rather, because of the dominant idiom of nineteenth and early twentieth-century tourism. Within the dominant discourse of moral and social improvement, those landscapes were esteemed that most closely resembled the southern English countryside—fertile and gently rolling hills, a hint of historical romance, comfortable towns, and so on. It followed that the most popular destination of tourists, and the first area within the region to succumb to a precocious experiment in 'total tourism,' was the Annapolis Valley, which was thought not only to look somewhat Italian, but to be imbued with historical romance as the setting of Longfellow's *Evangeline*. Within this same horizon, however, the rockbound South Shore was by contrast constituted as the bleak, sterile, even monstrous and repulsive negation of beauty.[6] Even in locally-produced writings, the rocky shoreline is seen as the province's unattractive, iron frame, which visitors and intending immigrants should not mistakenly assume is typical of the beautiful and abundant interior[7]. The travel books of the period 1890-1914 present what is to us an odd assortment of attractions—coal mines, the homes of wealthy individuals, immaculate public parks, the wondrous hedgerows of Yarmouth—which make sense only within a way of seeing which esteemed civilization (in the narrow 'bourgeois' sense) above other attractions.

Then, in the 1920s, everything changed, in the social equivalent of a "paradigm shift." The photographer Wallace MacAskill produced the first widely circulated image of Peggy's Cove in his *Quiet Cove* (1921) and the Cove became a major theme in his renowned work.[8] Kenneth Leslie and other poets made the Cove a symbol of the beauties of nature and the admirable hardiness of the fisherfolk, while a small army of amateur and professional painters (notably Stanley Royle and his associates and students) depicted Peggy's Cove (or coves like it) in countless paintings. The Cove first achieved prominence in provincial tourist literature in 1927, and by 1935 had clearly achieved star status as the province's most renowned beauty spot. In the 1940s the writers J.F.B. Livesay and Dorothy Duncan brought the celebration of Peggy's Cove to an ecstatic climax in travel writings that had a national influence.[9]

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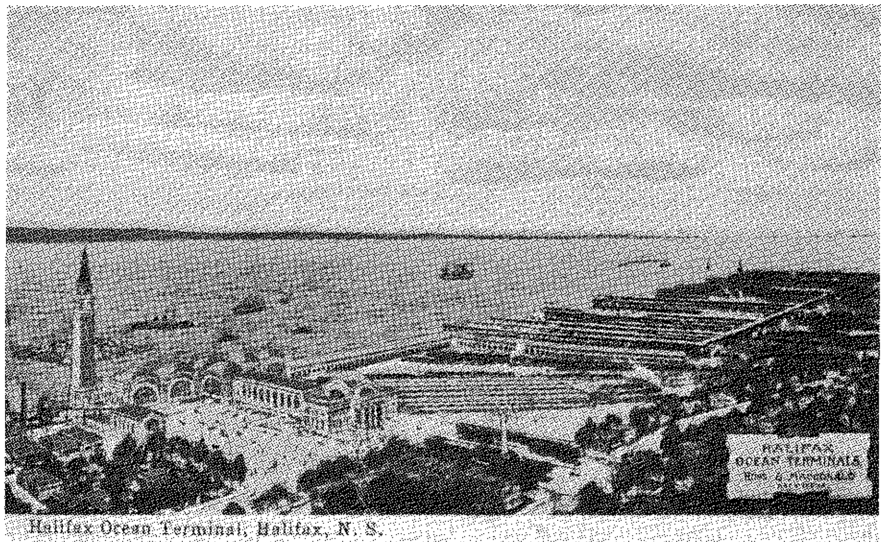
How should we try to explain these new evaluations and ways of seeing, whereby a vista once described as sterile and ugly became the ultimate signifier of the province's natural beauty? First, Peggy's Cove was celebrated by local cultural producers as a sign of the distinctiveness, beauty, and worth—the *difference*—of the Maritime region, at a time of severe economic and social crisis. They selected that landscape and that culture which most closely conformed to their ideal of the regional essence. Secondly, Peggy's Cove was, somewhat later, taken up by commercially minded promoters, who emphasized those aspects of the province which were most in keeping with a new emphasis on "nature" and "the primitive" in international tourism, which in turn reflected a very marked sense of disillusionment with western civilization in the interwar period.

Although there were nineteenth-century anticipations of regionalism, Ernest Forbes is undoubtedly correct to date "the birth of the region" in the postwar period.[10] It was only with the brutally rapid collapse of the Maritimes' industrial base in the 1920s that an earlier idiom of progress began gradually to recede. Then, slowly, beginning in the early 1920s and culminating in the 1940s, a quite different discourse—predicated on the idea that Maritimers were *essentially* rural, traditional, and conservative—took hold, and became the unquestioned common sense of those who thought about the region.

Progressive historiography in Nova Scotia, as found, for example, in R.R. McLeod's compendious *Markland*, had been emphatically teleological and future-oriented. History in this Victorian conception moved triumphantly through time towards its goals, which were, here as elsewhere, industrial, scientific, and moral. In contrast, the new mythical history of the 1920s and 1930s—found in F.W. Wallace's *Wooden Ships and Iron Men* and its numerous progeny—flowed backwards, by establishing a regional "essence" which was then postulated as "an immutable if not always ancient past." In this "chronologically and sometimes violently mournful perspective," writes Patrick Wright, on the analogous British case, "the essential stuff of history remains identical through time—even though it is unfortunately all concentrated at an earlier point in the passage of time. Hence the passage of years becomes entropic, opening up an ever widening gulf between 'us' in the present and what remains 'our' rightful and necessary identity in an increasingly distant past."[11] The new historicism of the 1920s and 1930s entailed commemorating the dying glow of a mythically-conceived past. Paradoxically, however, it did so by eliding past and present—by making the present into a kind of "past," which could be enjoyed and savoured with a fond melancholy pleasure. In empirically-oriented teleological history, argues Wright, "historical development moves forward through qualitative change and transformation. Precisely because it takes place in a transformative process a distinction is established between past and present. The 'historical past' is alienated from the present: it becomes other to the extent that it is transcended and therefore no longer with the present. This way of conceiving the relation between the past and present is founded on a properly historical consciousness (without which it would be impossible to conceive the past as in any way distinct from the present)." The mythical conception that came to prevail in the



The travel books of the period 1890-1914 presented an odd assortment of attractions, a way of seeing which esteemed civilization. Peggy's Cove and it's fisherman were considered neither beautiful nor picturesque.

Maritimes in the 1920s, is quite different:

> In the mythical conception, however, 'History' can be reversed and run backwards because it has identity rather than difference as its theme. What existed then can be retrieved and recognised now because it remains truly 'ours.' In this mode repetition is of the essence.... There need accordingly be no essential discontinuity between past and present as long as the ceremonies are carried out and respected. As an essence that is embodied in such ceremonies the nation is immutable—either it finds its witness in the present or it is lost and betrayed.[12]

This essentialist treatment of Maritime identity is that of an organic and conservative society indisposed to rash innovation and social experiment.

Given the pervasive power of this re-reading of history, across a wide cultural spectrum, it takes a real effort of will to remember that it, no less than its progressive antecedent, was a highly selective construct. After the First World War, fishermen, who became the "essential" Nova Scotians, were far outnumbered by industrial workers; only a small minority of Nova Scotians lived in isolated outports; the schooners of the Lunenburg fleet were typical neither of the Age of Sail (which had effectively lost its battle with steam in the 1880s) nor of the province's mainly inshore fishing industry; and the *Bluenose*, which became the ultimate signifier of the provincial essence, did so through an activity (winning races) which was at best a peripheral part of the traditional fishery. It would have been as appropriate to select as "essential" Nova Scotians the militant coal miners and to found the claim for regional difference on their distinctive traditions: but to do so would not have been in keeping with the emphatically petit-bourgeois perspectives of most of the local cultural producers. The generation of these powerful symbols represented the choices and decisions of those in a position to impose these meanings upon the population at large: and this meant, essentially, Halifax cultural producers and externally-based travel writers, working closely in tandem with each another. There is nothing unusual about a middle-class response to social crisis which, rather than launching a critique of the system, takes refuge from class conflict in a kind of integral nationalism, and this seems likely to be one significant key to the flowering of regionalism in the 1920s.

There were two connecting links between economic collapse and the invention of new traditions. One was the local intellectual response to the socio-economic, which took the form of a kind of defensive neo-nationalism. The other was tourism, which internationally began to emphasize the discovery of "natural," pre-industrial people, thus providing a niche for Nova Scotia.

The local cultural producers were, for the most part, members of the Halifax middle class, which provides us with perhaps the best answer to the question, "Why Peggy's?" Peggy's Cove became Halifax's cultural antithesis and playground, where painters and poets could savour peasant authenticity in a pleasing natural setting, without having to go a long way. What they sought, generally, were the "natural Maritimes," and for some, this search was tinged with a mournful, romantic regionalism.

The multi-faceted, interwoven traditions of regional literature and art from 1920 to 1950—with Thomas Raddall and G.M. Adams writing forewords for MacAskill, with the artist Donald MacKay illustrating Raddall's history, with Andrew Merkel introducing so many friends to Peggy's Cove and producing a book on the *Bluenose* with MacAskill, and so on—allow us to speak, rather tentatively, of a regionalist moment among Nova Scotia cultural producers, of a newly awakened passion for the maritime tradition and those coastal communities which seemed to embody it.

Thus heralded in photography, poetry and art, Peggy's Cove drew thousands of tourists in the 1930s and 1940s, drawn by travel accounts which enthusiastically vulgarized the artists' and poets' pastoral vision. (In many cases, local cultural producers were drawn directly into the sphere of promotion—in 1929, for instance, MacAskill's vision of Peggy's Cove was promoted in the Province's major promotional pamphlet, with the caption: "Visitors to Nova Scotia find new life in the sharp breath of the sea."[13]) Those in search of the "natural" were attracted to plain and humble folk: not, unsurprisingly, the industrial workers, for whom many middle-class tourists felt no particular fondness, but the pre-industrial lower classes—"the peasant, the fisherman—specifically the poorer inhabitants of Europe's Mediterranean regions ('...for the people are as beautiful as the land')." [14]

Nova Scotia's farmers and fishermen could be made to fit this peasant ideal admirably. Nova Scotia became an "an old-world land that civilization has not

yet robbed of its charm," as one travel writer wrote in 1925, wrapping himself in a rather perplexing contradiction in terms. "True, you will hear the roar of trains, you will see the scurrying of automobiles. But still the ox carts creep along the roads, the great patient beasts plodding as in a dream, and by their side go weather-beaten old men who look with annoyance and disdain on the conveyances of modern life."[15] (The process of "framing" seems to be going on here right before our eyes: oxen are centred and in focus, the automobiles and trains are blurry distractions on the edges). It was an old-world, pre-industrial society in which the visitor from the more developed world could savour the trusting innocence of the natives.

"Peggy's Cove is rapidly becoming the most famous and beloved spot on the Nova Scotian coast," *Mayfair* reported in 1948, crediting much of this new-found fame to the work of MacAskill, the writings of J.F.B. Livesay, and the efforts of countless amateur artists.[16] Communities that had been denounced as backward hamlets by Victorian travellers and missionaries (and sometimes by twentieth-century social activists, who noted their high rate of tuberculosis and the appalling low prices for fish) were now re-constituted as refuges from the twentieth century. G.M. Adams, under contract as a writer by the provincial government, was lavish in his praise. "A nest of rocky hills, neat homes, hospitable fisher folk, and ravishing natural beauty. . . .There are no trees, very little earth in which to plant anything—just beautiful blue grey rocks, tiny harbors with their fishing boats, nets and crates, tidy homes with their. . . flowers—and the sea. And here a peaceful, contented, happy folk. Sturdy and honest as the rocks that support their homes. Not a pessimist among them!"—which would have been refreshing news indeed in such Depression years.[17]

Within the new idiom, Peggy's Cove was constructed on the basis of its absences. "As everywhere that people lead a simple wholesome outdoors life," we read in another visitor's account of life in Peggy's Cove,

> "The very statement of their days is caviar to our ears. The natural life is at last news. These people have never been kept awake by trolley-cars, newsboys, street radios, or klaxons. They do not make out laundry-lists. They never have to telephone and ask 'Are you dressing?' They do not telephone. They do not lose latchkeys. They never have to tip bell-hops, coatroom-attendants, and taxi-drivers. They never have occasion to say 'What an awful picture!' They neither makes speeches at banquets nor have to listen to them. They need never walk between rows of lying advertisements on their way to work. They never hear 'Mister, will you gimme the price of a cup of coffee?' They never see a neighbor put out on the street. The very language of our times—margin-calls, fade-outs, caterpillar club, spit-ball—would be strange to them. Indeed to these dwellers on the bare ancestral rock, to which they even cart the soil for their flower-beds, our subway civilization must seem a lurid undergrowth."[18]

In *Bluenose: A Portrait of Nova Scotia* (1942), Dorothy Duncan was delighted to add to these defining absences of South Shore life, the absence of serious politics or social questions, and of statesmen or intellectuals; given their peasant stolidity, it was even rather surprising that they had had the imagination to turn to the sea in the first place.[19] (The trick to such writing, as Raymond Williams has reminded us, is that the contrast between the city and the court, nature and worldliness, depends on the suppression of work in the countryside and the property relations through which this work is organized.)[20] As for Peggy's Cove, Duncan found it to be a perfect example of what an outport used to be like, though she lamented that its character had been largely lost with improved transportation and the coming of tourists.[21] Others trusted in the "sturdy good sense of her people" to keep Peggy's "pure and unspotted from the world." [22]

With the entry of the state into tourism planning (signalled by the formation of the Nova Scotia Travel Bureau in 1923 and the Publicity Bureau in 1924, as well as a crash program of road-paving and the designation of various highways as specially designed tourist trails), the pastoral idiom acquired the status of an

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version was, "Nova Scotia, Canada's Playground," which rather incongruously metamorphized by 1927 into "The Playground with a History." Finally the words achieved permanence in 1929, with "Canada's Ocean Playground." [23] This motto crystallizes perfectly the social construction of the province within the new idiom: while nineteenth-century Nova Scotians had never stopped talking about industrial progress and their province's buoyant future, every license plate now proclaimed the province's naturalism and hedonism in the context of the country as a whole. We expect a dialogue with the past in the province that gave us "Je me souviens"; what do we expect from "Canada's Ocean Playground"? Perhaps just what the slogan says: here is a place where one can regress to the lost innocence of childhood, and which is defined, fundamentally, for *others*.

Total Tourism and the Proliferation of Simulacra

We have shown that Peggy's Cove was constructed in the 1920s within a new pastoral idiom, by local cultural producers and by the public and private promoters of the tourism industry. The idiom has not changed decisively since then. Contemporary tourist literature from Nova Scotia still conveys the impression that the province is a tranquil, pre-industrial haven from the rigours of the twentieth century.

However, what has changed decisively—since about 1960—is the scope and character of the state's involvement. Until the 1960s, although the state was instrumental in building the infrastructure of tourism (roads, some hotels, visitors' bureaux and so on) and in soliciting tourists, it generally stopped short of orchestrating the actual experience of tourists in the province. (There were some interesting exceptions, such as the invention of new sporting events). This limited the extent to which the state undertook the responsibility for constructing an appropriate past, which was left in the less powerful hands of such private interests as the Dominion Atlantic Railroad. Once, however, this limitation was overcome, the path to "total tourism," in which the state and capital collaborate in the active shaping of the tourists' experience, lay open, and the pastoral idiom, far from retreating in the face of indus-

After the First World War, fisherman, who became the "essential" Nova Scotians, were far outnumbered by industrial workers.

Toilers of the Sea, *Wallace MacAskill, 1928*

trialization and urbanization, became far more pervasive.

It is now assumed that the Department of Tourism and other arms of the state have the right and the responsibility to design the province's calendar of events so that it exerts the maximum pull in the international tourist market. An imposing array of pseudo-events—the Gathering of the Clans, the Nova Scotia Tattoo, scores of local festivals—fill the tourist season. The province co-ordinates this effort by selecting a general theme: "Old Home Summer," or "We've Come for the Ceilidh." (The Scots, although never a majority of the population, through the invention of a provincial tartan in the 1950s, the stationing of a brawny piper at the province's tourist bureau at the border, and the strategic use of Gaelic, have displaced the Acadians as the province's major ethnic attraction). In a recent report, the province's Select Committee on Tourism captured the all-inclusive qualities of this new style of tourism very well. "The product," the report calmly notes, "includes a range of diverse elements which, taken together, constitute the tourism consumer's experience: natural attractions and features, facilities and services, transportation and other infrastructure components, and the socio-cultural features of the resident population." [24]

The recent uses to which the "Age of Sail" has been put demonstrates the new correlation of economic and cultural forces at work. The 1984 Visit of the Tall Ships, and the Parade of Sail in Halifax raised the rhetoric of "Maritimicity" to the level of mass spectacle. As Atlantic Cultural Consulting, Limited suggested, "The Tall Ships' visit to Canada this summer is an historic and splendid event. An event that will not quickly be repeated." (All the more reason, naturally, for one to get out and order an individually *numbered* and *signed "original* print" of the Tall Ships, accompanied by a *genuine* certificate of *authenticity*: the rhetoric of postmodernism always seems to need reassurance about its own ontological status, it always seems to be pinching itself to make sure it is not merely part of some great dream of capital from which it cannot awaken).

The music which accompanied the television spectacular, "Sail on Nova Scotia," was vetted by the Department of Tourism, which wanted a theme song which would win the hearts of Nova Scotians and visitors alike. Picking up the official line on cue, *Atlantic Insight* proclaimed that "Sail on Nova Scotia... there's still so much to sea," was "enthusiastically acclaimed by Nova Scotians from every walk of life." The state also set aside $160,000 to the CBC television's "Coast of Dreams," and no less a personage than provincial Premier John Buchanan, promoted the television special as a "tale about a disheartened sea captain who finds renewed meaning in his life through his contact with the spirit of Nova Scotia." That many people responded to this media saturation is evident: during the Parade of Sail, an estimated 300,000 people gathered on Halifax waterfront to watch the Tall Ships depart. [25]

This cultural event was distinctly "post modern" not only in its massive size and dependence on the state, but because, focussing on vessels that often were literal simulacra of non-existent originals, it caused the actual history of seafaring in the nineteenth century to recede in memory. In the Parade of Sail, one heard no tedious accounts of labour on the vessels or merchants' strategies: everything was wrapped in a lustrous Disney glow, the warm and consoling light of infantile enchantment. We found ourselves before a spectacle which provided, in Jim Overton's words, "a psychic escape, but into an imagined world which does not exist and never existed." [26] "Myth," writes Barthes, "deprives the object of which it speaks of all history. All that is left for one to do is to enjoy this beautiful object without wondering where it came from." [27]

Nova Scotia was represented in this particular pseudo-event by a simulacrum of the *Bluenose*, a vessel promoted by the Halifax *Herald* and whose victories in the 1920s and 1930s were accompanied by a fervent outpouring of regionalist pride. The motives behind these races and the emotions aroused by the *Bluenose* were many and various. They included a progressive belief that the design of fishing vessels could be scientifically tested in such races, a nostalgic sense of a need to preserve momentoes from the dying age of sail, and regional pride. The impulse to build a replica of the vessel came, appropriately enough, from Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, which in the 1950s commissioned the Smith and Rhuland yard in Lunenburg to build a replica of the *Bounty* for its forthcoming movie. The building of this simulated *Bounty* for a film studio prompted reflections on the possibility of similarly recreating the *Bluenose*. These were promptly taken up by a regional brewery, Olands, which already sold a beer called "Schooner" and could see the promotional possibilities. The vessel was built in 1963.

Bluenose II is thus deeply rooted in the economic processes we have come to know very well in late capitalism: its homeland is, unmistakably, the world of public relations. Here the notion of the "simulacrum" is a disturbingly literal one. *Bluenose II* is really the *Bluenose* (we are assured again and again, with anxious insistence), with only a few minor differences: the *Bluenose* actually did go to the Banks, it actually smelled of fish and salt, it actually did win races, and it met its end while prosaically doing business in the West Indies. *Bluenose II* has been freed from these fetters to actual history. It has been purified of the smell of fish and of the risks of racing: cut loose from these intrusions of realism, it can now become a purely aesthetic object, free to parade, as an infinitely beautiful and isolated work of art, before delighted crowds. *Bluenose* measured her achievements in the numbers of races won and catches caught, while *Bluenose II* counts her victories in the totals of favourable press releases and new tourist arrivals.

The full sense of this transition from populist romanticism in the 1920s to state-orchestrated Maritimicity is conveyed by Silver Donald Cameron's *Schooner: Bluenose and Bluenose II* (1984), intended as an instant book for the Tall Ships spectacle, but with a (surely intentional) subtext of black humour and squalor. Try as Cameron might to invoke the time-honoured clichés of wind-and-water romanticism, the story of *Bluenose II* is simply not the stuff of dream and legend. When the *Bluenose II* sails from Nova Scotia to Atlantic City, Cameron hopefully essays the faithful "rite of passage" rhetoric. The mere boys who had set sail from Nova Scotia such a short time before, he writes, now seem more like men, they have a different bearing—indeed, Cameron sees evidence of this transition in . . . their avid devouring of a girlie magazine in the cabin. The civil servants under sail keep reassuring Cameron, and perhaps themselves, that they aren't really sailing an illusion—true postmoderns, they anxiously grope for some confirmation of their own reality. There was something hauntingly forlorn about this story: in the 1970s, the *Bluenose II* sailed aimlessly on the high seas of hedonism, with local hacks using public money to pay staggering liquor bills and inept seamen crashing wildly around North America's ports. We want to laugh along with Cameron, but the fare, like so much myth, is ultimately far too rich: the political firings, the hard-drinking parties, finally a drunken Halifax party-goer dead in a sea of his own vomit.... And there are no heroic races to relieve this saga of unrelieved aimlessness. Only such monuments as the world of post modern tourism can erect: "An estimated fifty thousand Americans visited the vessel and more than two thousand travel-industry reresentatives were entertained aboard. Largely as a result of the trip, the number of U.S. tourists visiting Nova Scotia went up 18.5 percent over 1973 and the province won a Silver Award from the Public Relations Society of America. . ." [28]

An embalmed, cleansed past: on the Halifax Waterfront, yet another shrine to Maritimicity, its lacquered face is everywhere. The redevelopment of the city's waterfront has allowed old, functional buildings to be 'saved,' but only in the sense that they now convey a vague, stereotypical 'pastness' or '1860s-ness,' while new buildings, such as the Sheraton Hotel, cannibalize plain early nineteenth-century styles all the better to highlight the brass-infested opulence within. To walk through modern Halifax today is to confront a whole battery of aesthetic signs, a pastiche of pseudo-nineteenth century images and effects, which, for all

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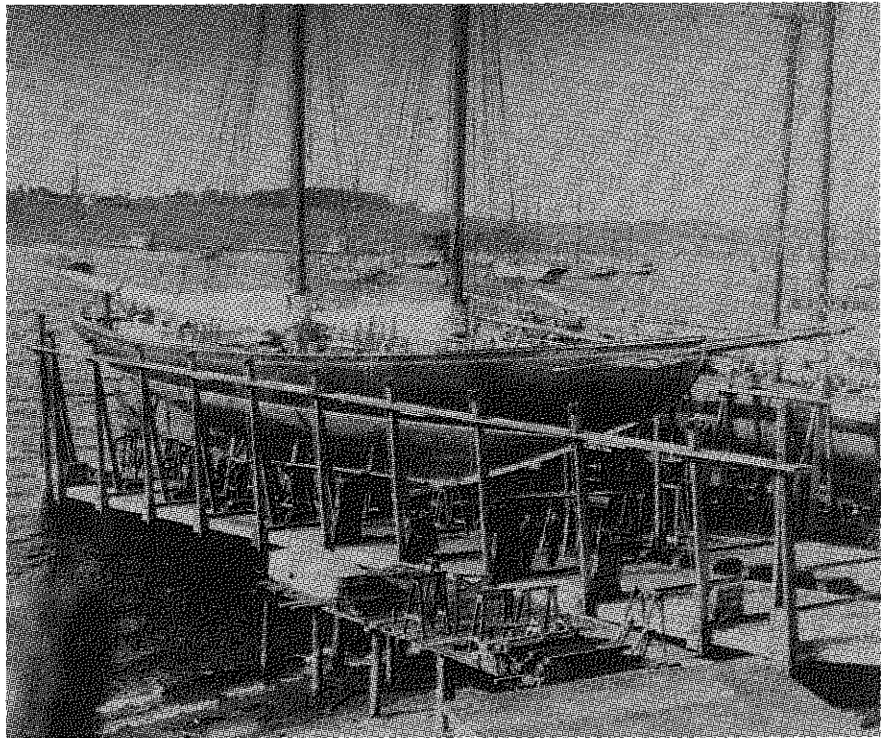
their ostensible "historicism," testify to nothing other than the waning of any effective sense of ourselves living history, our post modern capacity to bracket the past as just one more style. Nothing better captures the situation than the penetrating irony of the name of Halifax's "Historic Properties," which, in an immense pastiche of images—stone warehouses, the Bluenose, and "historical" props (wagon wheels, iron anchors, punitive stocks as tourist playthings) turn history into one vast, highly profitable property, where the claim to authenticity underwrites the banal universality of standard-issue stores and boutiques. And in these shops, one may purchase handicrafts and standardized folk art, much of which appears to be locally-rooted and old while in fact representing the labour of poorly remunerated workers (some of them in the Third World) and forms of recent invention.

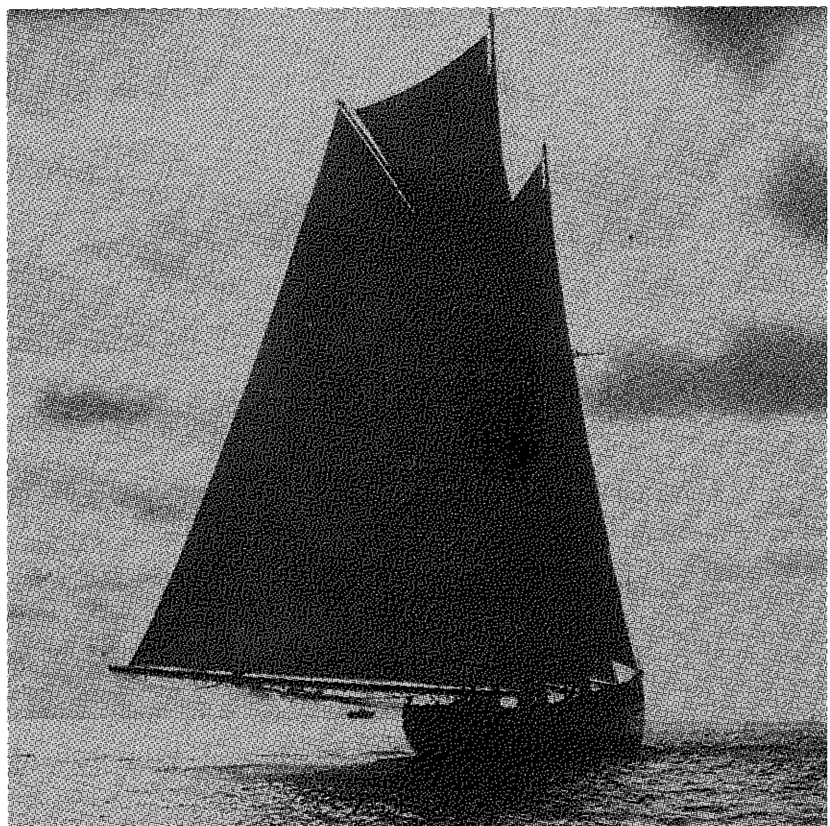
But we must return to Peggy's Cove, which through the years has become a purer and purer simulacrum, a copy of a prosperous and tranquil fishing village which never in fact existed. Outwardly, Peggy's Cove has changed little since the 1940s. The road has been paved and straightened, the government has built parking facilities, and a large commercially operated restaurant has been strategically placed at the end of the road. Peggy's Cove faithfully produces both timelessness and history for the crowds: one may still go there and feel that one is touching an essence which has persisted, unchanged, since the beginning of the last century.

The modern state has made quite sure of this. Robert Stanfield's Conservative government established the Peggy's Cove Commission in 1962, to protect the charm of the community and that of the seven-mile coastal stretch nearby. Under this legislation, the Minister of Municipal Affairs was given the power to purchase, expropriate, or otherwise acquire land in the area, and a Peggy's Cove Commission made up of local and provincial officials and four additional members from the community, was given broad planning rights, including that of designating the purposes for which buildings may not be used, occupied, erected, constructed, altered, reconstructed, or repaired. It was also to control "the architectural design, character or appearance of any or all buildings proposed to be erected within the area."[29] Thanks to these regulations, an annual tourist inflow estimated at about 200,000 persons from May to October (to a community with 47 permanent residents) has not led to a flagrant commercialization of the site.[30] An outward continuity of appearance masks a whole series of political and cultural changes which have, in essence, transformed a real fishing village into a self-consciously constructed simulacrum of the pre-industrial community. The rocks are sprayed with paint or acid to remove the evidence of paint-wielding tourists, strict prohibitions have been placed on children selling fudge and the other outdoors activities one normally associates with vast congregations of tourists, the precise angle of roof line and style of windows in houses are closely regulated, and vigorous steps taken to stamp out deviations from the picturesque norm. Once the pastoral idiom was the harmless whimsy of a few tourists; now it carries the force of law.

It is in this fairly direct and obvious sense that Peggy's Cove's appearance as a "tranquil" and unspoiled fishing hamlet is patently a constructed image.



Bluenose on the slip in Lunenberg, *Wallace MacAskill*
Bluenose running with the wind, *Wallace MacAskill*

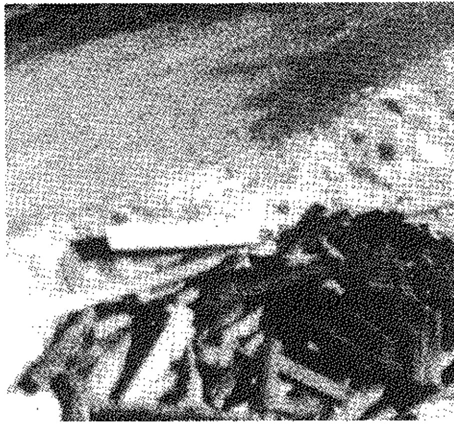


Bluenose II has been freed from the fetters of actual history. It has been purified of the smell of fish and of the risks of racing. Cut loose from these intrusions of realism, it can now become a purely aesthetic object.

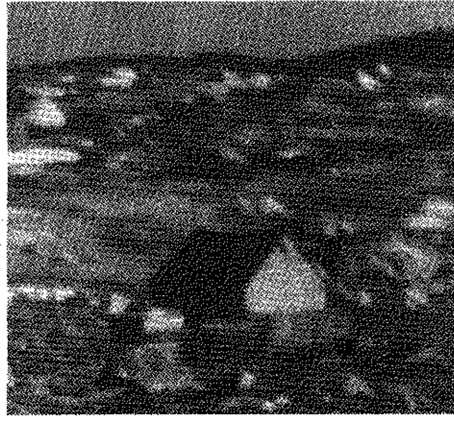
But even without this tight web of regulation, it is scarcely representative of the fishing outports of the province—there are no unpainted houses, shacks, or poor people. There is, in short, an immense divide between what is being presented to us—this unspoiled, quaint, pre-industrial Cove—and the actual, overtly political and economic, processes which made this Cove possible, and an equally large gap between this beautiful image and its actual history. [31]

"If they haven't already done so, everyone who owns a Winnebago will eventually visit Peggy's Cove," writes one columnist sarcastically, "and (1)suffer a vertigo attack watching the heaving surf, (2)stab themselves in the finger trying to eat a lobster, and (3)buy a sou'wester for Uncle Bill which they will then wear back to Halifax to blend in with the locals. . . .The place is a Las Vegas of Quaint." We laugh: it is a good line, and there is something faintly ludicrous about a community of 47 souls being inundated with "75 war wagons,. . .their occupants opening up on anything that was faintly picturesque with blazing Nikons. . ."[32] Yet it is a kind of twilight, postmodern laughter. Nova Scotia, with its simulated racing schooners that will not race, with its hosts and hostesses professionally trained to simulate smiles that do not mean what they seem to mean, with its simulated fishing hamlet that only the state can preserve in its pre-industrial splendour, has become the homeland of the surreal. One does not come here to escape the postmodern sense of unreality, but to feel its sharp, cutting edge, not to recover the healthy folk past before capitalism but to glimpse what will happen everywhere once all images are commodities, and all signs fully motivated.

But why should the state stop at just one, relatively restrained, simulacrum of a fishing community? Why not go further and invent a community from scratch? To get a sense of how entrenched Maritimicity has become as an idiom, consider the leading question that will dominate provincial tourism circles in 1988: the proposal that the government invest an estimated $13 million in a re-creation of a fishing village at Upper Clements, near Annapolis Royal. The core of this theme park—which may also contain an amphitheatre,



an imitation grist mill, a "sophisticated" miniature golf course in the shape of Nova Scotia, a discreet roller coaster, and a maze—will be an idealized reconstruction of a fishing village. This will lend an element of historic "authenticity" to a site which tourism planners hope will serve as a "honeypot" for Americans and others in the Annapolis Valley.



Does this concept make sense, given that the demographic base of our tourism industry is based on the wealthy, comfortable citizens of Canada and northeastern United States? Will the jobs provided be unionized and well-remunerated? Why invest this money in the Annapolis Valley (incidentally in the riding of a prominent cabinet minister) rather than paving roads in other areas?[33] But pertinent and useful as they are, such practical questions somehow seem to miss the core of our uneasiness. This uneasiness stems from the state's candid commercialization of an idealized Golden Age which never existed. What makes us uneasy is that the state, acting to further the interests of the tourism industry, has taken upon itself the task of interpreting history. As in Peggy's Cove, an ideologically loaded historical myth will be given (as Barthes would say) the full guarantee of nature, a material and hence irrefutable embodiment.

Human emancipation cannot even be imagined without a scrupulously honest interrogation of, and a serious dialogue with, the past. What becomes of the future when the past is colonized by capital and by the capitalist state, and the possibility of this serious dialogue removed?

One-third of the houses of Peggy's Cove are not inhabited on a year-round basis, and the number of residents who make their living off the tourist trade now exceeds those who go fishing. "Preservationists" are worried. Even unserviced houses in Peggy's Cove, often owned by Haligonians, have commanded prices of up to $79,000, somewhat beyond the reach of the average fisherman on unemployment insurance. "If these wharves go down and with just a few fishermen," worries one resident, "I don't think it's going to be Peggy's Cove. It's just going to be a place to go stretch your legs and get back in your car again."[34] The future that seems to haunt Peggy's Cove today is that of becoming an "archetypal" fishing village with no fishermen, a monument to rugged individualism propped up by state subsidies, a haven of rural tranquility owned by Americans and urban Nova Scotians and overrun with tourists. In an article in the province's "heritage" handout, Kildare Dobbs, with a rigorous adherence to the essentialism that is tourism's unwritten philosophy, proclaims: "Nova Scotia is a province that becomes more itself in every decade."[35] He may, unfortunately, be right. Besieged with simulacra, invented traditions, deftly manipulated myths, and pseudo-events, Nova Scotians may indeed become more and more like their "true" folk essences every decade, the ultimate, living "simulacra," bereft of their collective memories, their actual traditions, and their future.

Ian MacKay will be teaching social history at Queen's University, Kingston in the fall and is an editor of New Maritimes. *This article is part of an on-going project on the invention of tradition in the Maritimes.*

Notes

1 Barthes, *Mythologies* (Frogmore, trans. Annette Lavers, 1973), p.143.

2 Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Crisis of Western Societies," *Telos*, No.53 (Fall 1982), pp.26-27.

3 Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review*, Number 146 (July-August 1984), p. 66.

4 Jay Appleton would explain the aesthetic pleasure offered by Peggy's Cove in terms of prospect-refuge theory, which argues that the capacity of an environment to ensure the ability to see without being seen is an immediate source of aesthetic satisfaction. (See *The Experience of Landscape* (London, 1975), p.73. Freudian insights could also be brought to bear on the enduring appeal of the cove flanked by the lighthouse tower. Neither approach seems promising, however, when it comes to explaining a landscape which was so dramatically re-evaluated in the course of its history.

5 Karl Baedeker, *The Dominion of Canada With Newfoundland and an Excursion to Alaska: Handbook for Travellers* (Leipzig, 1907); *Osgood's Maritime Provinces: A Handbook for Travellers* (Boston, James R. Osgood, 1883); S.E.Dawson, *Hand-Book for the Dominion of Canada* (Montreal, 1888).

6 Hugh Murray, *An Historical and Descriptive Account of British America* (Edinburgh, 1839), Vol.II, 154, 160; Andrew Learmont Spedon, *Rambles among the Blue-Noses; Or, Reminiscences of a Tour Through New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, During the Summer of 1862* (Montreal, 1863), 124., among many titles that could be cited to substantiate this point.

7 See, for example, Herbert Crosskill, *Nova Scotia: Its Climate, Resources and Advantages. Being a General Description of the Province, for the Information of Intending Emigrants* (Halifax, 1872), p.5.

8 For a collection of MacAskill's evocative photographs, see *MacAskill* (Halifax, 1986), although unfortunately this book does not have much in the way of an interpretation.

9 J.F.B.Livesay,
Dorothy Duncan, *Blu*
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10 Ernest R. Fo
1976), Chapter 2.
11 Patrick Wrigh
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p.176.
12 Wright, *On Li*
13 *Nova Scotia,*
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14 Louis Turner
International Tourism
York, 1976), p.77.
15 Emma-Linds
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16 "Peggy's Cov
17 George Matth
(n.p. [Halifax], n.d. [c.
18 Maurice Long
19 Duncan, *Blue*
20 Williams, *Th*
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21 Duncan, *Blue*
22 *Mayfair*, May
23 *Vacation D*
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24 Nova Scotia,
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25 *Chronicle-He*
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26 Overton, " Pr
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27 Barthes, *Myth*
28 Cameron, *Sc*
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29 *Statutes* of No
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34 *Chronicle-He*
35 Kildare Dobb
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9 J.F.B.Livesay, *Peggy's Cove* (Toronto, 1944); Dorothy Duncan, *Bluenose: A Portrait of Nova Scotia* (NewYork and London, 1942).

10 Ernest R. Forbes, *Maritime Rights* (Montreal, 1976), Chapter 2.

11 Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (London 1985), p.176.

12 Wright, *On Living in an Old Country*, pp.177-178.

13 *Nova Scotia, Canada's Ocean Playaground* (n.p. [Halifax], n.d. [1929], p.38.

14 Louis Turner and John Ash, *The Golden Hordes*: International Tourism and the Pleasure Periphery (New York, 1976), p.77.

15 Emma-Lindsay Squier, *On Autumn Trails and Adventures in Captivity* (London 1925), p.9.

16 "Peggy's Cove," *Mayfair* (May 1948), p.84.

17 George Matthew Adams, *Glimpses of Nova Scotia*, (n.p. [Halifax], n.d. [c.1932], p.22.

18 Maurice Longstreth, *To Nova Scotia*, pp.15-16.

19 Duncan, *Bluenose*, p.140.

20 Williams, *The Country and the City* (Frogmore 1975) p.61.

21 Duncan, *Bluenose*, 150.

22 *Mayfair*, May 1948, pp.84-85.

23 *Vacation Days in Nova Scotia, The Land of Evangeline Route* (n.p., n.d. [1927]; *Nova Scotia, Canada's Ocean Playground* (n.p. [Halifax], n.d. [1929]).

24 Nova Scotia, House of Assembly, *The Interim Report of the Select Committee on Tourism* (Halifax 1986), pp.4-5.

25 *Chronicle-Herald*, 8, 12 July 1984; *Parade of Sail: Nova Scotia 1984* (Supplement to *Atlantic Insight*), June 1984.

26 Overton, " Promoting 'The Real Newfoundland,': Culture as Tourist Commodity," *Studies in Political Economy* (Autumn 1980), p.134. Overton's work on Newfoundland's response to tourism has been pathbreaking.

27 Barthes, *Mythologies*, p.151.

28 Cameron, *Schooner: Bluenose and Bluenose II* (Toronto 1984), pp.89-90.

29 *Statutes* of Nova Scotia, 11 Elizabeth II, Chapter10, 1962, "An Act to Create a Peggy's Cove Preservation Area and to Establish a Peggy's Cove Commission."

30 *Chronicle-Herald*, 14 April 1984.

31 It should also be noted that, even given its immense popularity as a tourist site, no attempt has been made to present to visitors any real information about the site itself, or to commemorate those who lived and died in the Atlantic fishery. In contrast, at Escuminac, New Brunswick, the death of 35 Northumberland Strait fishermen has been commemorated in a sculpture by Claude Roussel. There is one stone etching, by William DeMarsh, at Peggy's Cove, which celebrates, however, allegorical fishermen, rather than commemorating an actual event.

32 *Globe and Mail*, 27 April 1984.

33 These questions have been asked by the Halifax *Daily News*, in an editorial "Fake fishing village a bizarre concept," 23 January 1988.

34 *Chronicle-Herald*, 2 June 1984.

35 Kildare Dobbs, *Nova Scotia: The Living Heritage* (Halifax, Department of Tourism, 1987).

One does not come to Nova Scotia to escape the postmodern sense of unreality, but to feel its sharp, cutting edge, not to recover the healthy folk past before capitalism but to glimpse what will happen everywhere once all images are commodities, and all signs fully motivated.

Peggy's Cove, *Wallace MacAskill*