

The Geography of the Maritime Colonies in 1800: Patterns and Questions¹

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To fully appreciate the importance of the New England (Planter) migrations into Nova Scotia during the 1760s, it is essential to consider them in context. By taking the broader view, we can better grasp the contribution that this relatively small group of settlers on the margins of colonial America made to the development of Nova Scotia; we can more fully appreciate the magnitude of their achievements in occupying the land, establishing societies, providing for themselves and their descendants, and creating communities. We can begin to identify common and unique elements in their experience, and we can hope to focus attention on those aspects of the Planter past that seem to warrant further inquiry. To these ends, this paper is comprised of two parts. The first — “Patterns” — briefly surveys the human geography of the British “Maritime” colonies in 1800. It is no more than a sketch,² but it provides a backdrop against which the “Questions” of the second part of the paper can be considered.³

PATTERNS

In 1800, approximately 75-80,000 people lived in the four British North American colonies of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Cape Breton and Prince Edward Island that would come to be called the Maritimes. Halifax, with one-fifth of Nova Scotia's population and Saint John, with a tenth of New Brunswick's were the only cities. Shelburne ranked third among the region's urban centres, but it was little bigger than Fredericton, a capital village of 120 to 150 houses, “scattered,” according to the wife of a military officer, “on a delightful common of the richest sheep pasture I ever saw.”⁴ Despite their administrative functions as capitals of Prince Edward Island and Cape Breton, Charlottetown and Sydney were tiny places, and

1 I gratefully acknowledge the permission granted by the Canadian Association of Geographers to reproduce the illustrations and some of the text of the first part of this paper.

2 This sketch is elaborated in more detail in my article, “A Region of Scattered Settlements and Bounded Possibilities: Northeastern America, 1775-1800,” *The Canadian Geographer*, 31, 4(1987), 319-38.

3 These questions bear, in turn, upon the discussion of Nova Scotian development between 1755 and 1775 contained in my essay “A Province Too Much Dependent on New England,” *The Canadian Geographer* 31, 2(1987), 98-113 which reviews the foundation of the Planter settlements from a geographical perspective.

4 Mrs. Hunter to Elizabeth Bell, 7 August 1804, Provincial Archives of New Brunswick (PANB), MYO/H/76.

few other agglomerations were more than hamlets.

Along the rocky Atlantic shore of Nova Scotia and on the coast of Cape Breton (Type 1 areas in Figure 1) kitchen gardens and fish provided a meagre subsistence for residents of isolated fishing settlements. Life in these settlements was simple; a scattered group of merchants apart, their residents had little contact with the world beyond. There was little geometric order to these places whose accretive growth was shaped by beach room, topography and consanguinity. Dwellings were modest, their furnishings utilitarian. Sheds and flakes lined the strand, cabins were surrounded by irregular fences encompassing the acre or two of rock-bound soil from which the families supplemented diets of fish.⁵ Generalizing from fragmentary poll-tax returns of the 1790s, we can estimate that possibly three-quarters of the households in these communities owned cattle or horses.⁶ Over half of those with cattle kept only one or two beasts; very few had more than five. Sheep were less numerous than cattle, and were kept by fewer people, a handful of whom had flocks of ten or more. Cattle numbers were less than double the numbers of taxable men in these communities, and most individuals paid the minimum head tax.

Away from the fishing ports, mixed farming was characteristic. Through most of the region, farms were the means and purpose of existence. Potatoes, a variety of grains, peas and turnips were grown. In those areas designated Type 2 in Figure 1, surpluses were generally small and sporadic; when they entered trade it was, first and foremost, to sustain relatively high levels of local self-sufficiency. Again poll-tax returns indicate something of the economies of these communities. On a per capita basis, livestock holdings were clearly more substantial than in the fishing settlements. In broad terms, cattle and horses exceeded the number of people on the tax lists by a factor of 3 or 4. In some areas, such as Windsor with an unusual concentration of relatively well-to-do settlers, horses accounted for almost 25 percent of this total; generally they were considerably less important. Several individuals kept eight or more neat cattle (and some twenty-five or more). Sheep numbers were substantial and in some areas exceeded the number of cattle; flocks of twenty and thirty were not uncommon, but as in the fishing settlements fewer households kept sheep than cows.

5 J.J. Mannion, *Point Lance in Transition* (Toronto, 1976) is suggestive of the pattern of these settlements, although it deals with Newfoundland.

6 Poll tax returns from the 1790s are in RG 1, Vol. 443, 444, 444½ [*sic*] in the Public Archives of Nova Scotia (PANS). They are available on microfilm and several have been reprinted [e.g., in *Genealogical Newsletter of the Nova Scotia Historical Society*, 15 (1976), 14-23; *Canadian Genealogist*, 1(1979), 103-4]. All estimates from these returns are broad guesses. Best estimates have to be made in adjusting the records for extended family households and for taxable men living with their parents.

Only a few parts of the region (designated 3 in Figure 1) contributed regularly to the regional trade in foodstuffs. From older-settled districts on the productive Fundy marshlands, livestock went to Halifax and Saint John. From Lunenburg, roots and other supplies accompanied shipments of firewood to the provincial capital, and hay, at least, moved downriver from the immediate hinterland of Saint John. In the Fundy settlements, farmers grew a variety of grains and other crops on marsh and upland, but American flour was stiff competition in the region's urban markets, and these were mainly for local consumption. Livestock offered better returns, and large areas of dyked and undyked marsh were turned to hay as economic connection prompted product specialization. Numbers of cattle and horses exceeded the number of taxed individuals five or six fold in many parts of this district during the 1790s and William Trueman surely followed a familiar line of trade when he made two trips from Chignecto to Halifax in the summer of 1802, the first with thirty oxen and the second with twenty-four cattle for sale.⁷

Landscapes revealed rather more of the social geography of the area. Contrasts and incongruities were many: a few large well-established farms pointed up how little cleared land most settlers had; finely coiffed ladies in "pink and lilac high-heeled shoes" picked their ways over the "rugged rocky paths" of Saint John; hard-scrabble fishing settlements bore little resemblance to the well-cultivated marshland fringes of the Bay of Fundy; the social world of the Halifax elite was a vast remove from the humble settings of countless provincial lives.⁸

Through much of settled New Brunswick and southwestern Nova Scotia, building forms revealed the American origins of the settlers. The Cape Cod house was an established form on the Atlantic coast of Nova Scotia as it was along the shores of Maine and Massachusetts (Figure 2a).⁹ "Loyalist" or "Georgian" dwellings were the second recognizably American house type common through the southwest of the region by 1800 (Figure 2b). Gravestones also revealed the cultural ties between New England and southwestern Nova Scotia. Traditional death head motifs, more fashionable in early than late eighteenth-century Massachusetts, decorated gravemarkers shipped from Boston to the South Shore communities between 1765 and the 1780s (Figure 2c).¹⁰ Angelheads, or cherubim, carved on late eighteenth-century gravemarkers still stand in the graveyards of Liverpool, Chebogue and Halifax; many have close stylistic

7 Diary of William Trueman, 5 May 1802-April 1809, Mount Allison University Archives.

8 Mrs. Hunter to Mary Brydine [1804], PANB, MYO/H/76.

9 P. Ennals and D. Holdsworth, "Vernacular Architecture and the Cultural Landscape of the Maritime Provinces. A Reconnaissance," *Acadiensis*, X (1981), 86-106.

10 D. Trask, *Life How Short Eternity How Long: Gravestone Carving and Carvers in Nova Scotia* (Halifax, 1978) is a useful first study.

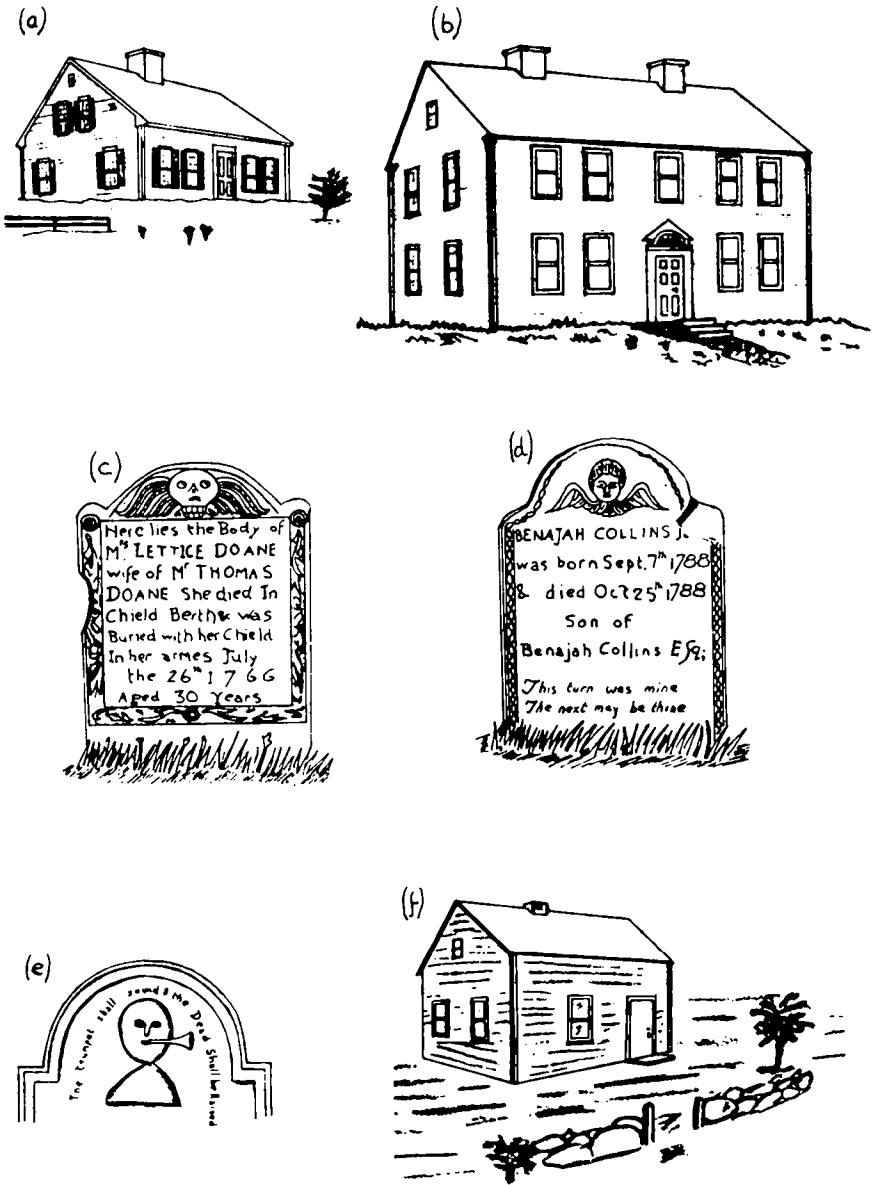


Figure 2

counterparts in Salem and neighboring Massachusetts towns (Figure 2d). Other symbols vied with cherubim in the 1790s. Angels sounding the trumpet of resurrection were perhaps most common in areas touched by the evangelical protestantism of many Planters and Loyalists (Figure 2e); urns — reflections of the neo-classical revival in the United States — appeared on imported and local stones by the turn of the century.

Elsewhere, distinctive cultural imprints on the landscape were less obvious. German inscriptions and simple floral designs distinguished the gravestones of Lunenburg. In Pictou, sandstone markers generally recorded the origins of the deceased but were rarely ornamented with more than a thistle or two. Yorkshiremen in Chignecto had begun to replicate in brick and stone, as well as wood, the Georgian and hipped roof forms of dwellings in their native country.¹¹ Through much of the Gulf Shore, Prince Edward Island and Cape Breton, however, the recency and economic marginality of settlement stamped a utilitarian similarity on the landscape. Crude cabins, hall and parlour dwellings, and simple log structures with two or three rooms were frequently home to returned Acadians and the first permanent shelters of immigrant families throughout the region (Figure 2f).

Still, the basic ethnic divisions that marked the region through the nineteenth century — an English/American south and west, a Scottish Gulf, Germans in Lunenburg, Irish in Halifax and the Cobequid area, and a cluster of Acadian enclaves in Madawaska, northeastern New Brunswick, western Prince Edward Island, southeastern Cape Breton and St. Mary's Bay — were already coming into focus at the end of the eighteenth century. So, too, were the associated patterns of religious differentiation.¹² And the essential and persistent patterns of economy and settlement in this overwhelmingly intractable region were clear: most people occupied modest farms or clustered in sea-girt villages; their distribution was basically peripheral; fingers of population followed the region's major valleys inland.¹³

In 1800, the Maritime colonies remained an unconsolidated amalgam of families and small communities. In most things, the reach of colonial institutions was limited. Although common backgrounds provided a measure of coherence among many groups of settlers, there had been little time for the settling of people into place. The considerable task of establishing, and maintaining, a subsistence threshold preoccupied the majority of the region's settlers. Yet economic, social and, above all,

11 Trask, *Life How Short....*, Ennals and Holdsworth, "Vernacular Architecture...."

12 A. H. Clark, "Old World Origins and Religious Adherence in Nova Scotia," *Geographical Review*, 50(1960), 317-44.

13 There are several published descriptions of the colonies early in the nineteenth century; fuller documentation is available in *The Canadian Geographer*, 31, 4(1987), 338.

geographical changes in this corner of the continent during the last half of the eighteenth century reflected broader patterns of North American development. The migratory fishery of Cape Breton shared a great deal with the trade that shaped landscapes and settlements in Newfoundland and much of the Gulf of St. Lawrence for better than three centuries. Essentially static in technology and organization, it turned "surplus" European labour to the extraction of New World resources. Closely controlled by powerful merchants, and integrating the western Atlantic littoral into a complex international trading network, it made that area a distant workplace for several thousand young men from the farms and villages of Ireland, southern England, France and the Channel Islands, but returned little to local, North American economies.

The essential characteristics of the region's resident fishery were repeated the length of the coast from Twillingate to Martha's Vineyard. Few prospered in this enterprise. In Nova Scotia, even more than in New England, the industry was "delicately balanced between profit and loss." Catches were variable, the cure unreliable, and as the American geographer Ralph H. Brown recognized long ago, those engaged at all levels of the trade were caught up in "a relentless battle on an economic front that included all countries of the North Atlantic basin."¹⁴ For the individual fisherman, the results were all too often debt and impoverishment.

Although colonial rather than European merchants dominated the resident fishery, and although its connections to the West Indies were stronger than those of the Mediterranean-oriented migratory fishery, the commercial spheres of the two enterprises overlapped and interlocked. Together they sketched, in outline, the complex web that bound the North Atlantic into a triangle of trade. But with few forward, backward or final demand linkages, neither migratory nor resident fishery was an effective motor of local economic growth in the Maritime colonies. Even the profits and multipliers of Nova Scotia's resident fishery tended to concentrate in Halifax. Beyond, harsh toil on the rugged Atlantic coast yielded a meagre subsistence for scattered families.

In New Brunswick, Loyalist dreams of creating a stable, ordered, hierarchical society had faded through fifteen years of settlement.¹⁵ Most colonists exhibited a sturdy independence while struggling to make their way in the new land. Few, indeed, shared the social conceptions of the elite. For most New Brunswickers, pedigree was a thin claim to privilege, and tenancy was unpalatable.¹⁶ For Governor John Parr, such signs were

14 R. H. Brown, *Historical Geography of the United States* (New York, 1948), 111.

15 W.S. MacNutt, *New Brunswick, A History 1784-1867* (Toronto, 1963), 11, 17, 42, 92. A.E. Morrison, "New Brunswick: the Loyalists and the Historians," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 3(1968), 39-49.

16 E.C. Wright, *The Loyalists of New Brunswick* (Moncton, 1972), 175-77. Ward Chapman

evidence that many Loyalists had inherited "a deal of that Liver, which disunited the [Thirteen] Colonies from their Mother Country."¹⁷ But prevailing attitudes were as much the product of conditions in New Brunswick as they were of convictions shaped in the old colonies. In New Brunswick, as on countless New World frontiers, land had little intrinsic worth. Its value was created by the hard labour of forest clearance and cultivation. And where readily available land allowed men to work for themselves, they would rarely toil for others. Thus large land holdings brought few economic benefits. Gentlemen of education and refinement were obliged "to undergo all the drudgery of farming"; servants were hard to come by; hirelings insisted on sharing their masters' tables; and British soldier William Cobbett, who had never thought of approaching a "Squire without a most respectful bow" in England, found himself, "in this New World," ordering many "a Squire to bring me a glass of Grog and even take care of my knapsack."¹⁸ Abhorred as they were by Loyalist leaders, the levelling democratic tendencies of North American settlement could not be excluded from New Brunswick. Around the indulgent islands of splendid houses, fine wines, and social pretensions sustained by military pensions and aristocratic conventions, most turn-of-the-century New Brunswickers inhabited an essentially egalitarian world. Recent and relatively remote, defined in opposition to the United States, and without a vigorous commercial outlet, their society bore a thin veneer of traditional English conservatism on its democratic New World core.¹⁹

Settlement in the Maritime colonies had proceeded largely by chance. For most settlers, the region had provided tolerable alternatives to unpromising or difficult circumstances in their old homelands; for some it had offered prospects of real advantage; to few had it yielded substantial wealth or comfort. Here and there newcomers had and might continue to find, for a time, a modest niche for themselves and their families. Whether that niche were in a narrow valley, along a rocky shore, or on an upland plateau, hard work, ingenuity and versatility — to say nothing of good fortune — were generally required to take advantage of it and to survive. And within a generation or two (at most) the limits of local resources would be met. As contexts changed so new adjustments were made. But always sons and daughters would move on, in the late eighteenth century to occupy new pockets of land and limited opportunity in the region, in the

Correspondence, Various items re. Kemble's Manor, Public Archives of Canada (PAC), MG 23 D1.

17 J. Parr to Nepean, 3 September 1784, PAC, CO 217. Vol. 59.

18 W. Reitzel, ed., *The Autobiography of William Cobbett* (London, 1933), 28.

19 E.C. Wright, "The Settlement of New Brunswick: An Advance Toward Democracy," Canadian Historical Association, *Report* (1944), 60 ff. R.C. Harris, "European Beginnings in the Northwest Atlantic. A Comparative View," in D.G. Allen, *Seventeenth-Century New England* (Boston, 1985), 119-52.

late nineteenth century to find work in Boston, and in the late twentieth century to seek their fortunes in Ontario and Alberta. Simply to recognize this reality is to conceive the experience of settlement in these provinces as an important variant of a recurrent facet of life in the Canadian archipelago.²⁰

QUESTIONS

A fuller grasp of this complex territory and its significance to our understanding of the country as a whole will not be developed easily. Sources are scarce and intractable. Detailed community records, rich and complete enough to allow such revealing analyses as we now have for New England, are wanting. The usual types of literary evidence — sermons, diaries, letters — are equally limited in extent and, as always, in their representativeness. Yet the insights of a generation of detailed work on the communities of New England, coupled with a growing interest in the comparative study of new-settled territories, suggest a host of questions relevant to the eighteenth-century Maritime colonies that might be approached by work in the land-office records, with genealogies, wills and inventories, and on the newspapers and periodicals of the region. By combining the results of such inquiries with a re-examination of traditional sources and whatever can be recovered of material culture patterns in the area, we might yet learn a good deal about the ways in which late eighteenth-century inhabitants of this region shaped, and regarded, their land and their lives.

Demographic and economic questions are central. Although there was hardly time, in eighteenth-century Nova Scotia, for the development of a clear generational or cyclical pattern of community life, the observed tendency of New England towns to move through sequential stages — initiation in the first generation, consolidation in the second and disintegration in the third — is probably rich that moulded many communities in the M

- 20 J.M. Bumsted, "Settlement by Chance: Lord S
Canadian Historical Review, 59 (1978), 170-88; I
Horton Township, Nova Scotia, 1760-1830," MA
1986; R.C. Harris "Regionalism and the Canadian
Heartland and Hinterland: A Geography of Cana
- 21 J.M. Bumsted and J.T. Lemon, "New Approaches in Early American Studies: the Local Community in New England," *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, 2 (1968), 98-112. J.P. Greene and J.R. Pole, eds., *Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era* (Baltimore, 1984), 14-5 also argue for a developmental framework that has three phases: social simplification; social elaboration; and social replication. For Nova Scotia, the records of the Registry of Deeds (RG47) and the Court of Probate (RG48), grouped by counties and (largely) on microfilm available at the Public Archives of Nova Scotia are the basic resources for such analysis. McNabb, "Land and Families..." effectively explores some of these important questions.

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of land-holding patterns, the quantities of productive land held by individuals, and the patterns of inheritance and land transfer could tell us much about how the Planters of the 1760s "initiated" life in their new setting, how successful they were in building the foundations upon which their sons and daughters could consolidate, and when, if ever, disintegration set in. These are crucial issues in substantially rural societies, in which land generally constitutes the foundation of wealth, not least because they underpin any discussion of "class-structure," status and power-relationships within the community. But do they have any relevance to the fishing settlements?

Everywhere the course of development was surely affected by migration and the rate of population growth, and a systematic assessment of early Nova Scotian fertility rates, family sizes and marriage ages would yield important clues to understanding the pressures and tensions shaping communities. Fertility rates and family sizes affect (and are affected by?) patterns of landholding, and in colonial America variations (in space and time) of the average age at marriage seem to have been associated with economic factors. Perhaps one might even suggest that relatively youthful marriages reflect an optimistic appraisal of the future of both self and society, and vice-versa.²² Furthermore we need to know more of the processes by and the degrees to which settlements on more — or less — remote frontiers were "simplified" by the selectivity of migration and the revised terms of access to land that prevailed in the new setting.²³ Detailed assessments of the circumstances of migrants in New England hearths and their subsequent fortunes in Nova Scotia would enhance our knowledge of the Maritimes and contribute to discussions of the settlement process, not least by revealing whether the migrations from New England were an essentially conservative escape from changing circumstances — a question relevant, in turn, to any discussion of the reasons for Nova Scotia's rejection of the American Revolution.²⁴

The patterns of everyday existence in northeastern America also warrant attention. The daily routines, the range of contacts and experience, the hopes, the fears and the family lives of well-to-do immigrants,

22 The Nova Scotian data, largely township records and genealogies, are particularly fragmentary, but the wider questions that a systematic assessment might address are many. See P.J. Greven, Jr., "Historical Demography and Colonial America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 24 (1967), 438-54; J. Potter, "Demographic Development and Family Structure," in Green and Pole, eds., *Colonial British America...*, 123-56 is an extended review of recent work.

23 Harris, "European Beginnings..."; R.C. Harris, "The Simplification of Europe Overseas," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 67 (1977), 469-83.

24 c.f. G.A. Rawlyk, ed., *Revolution Rejected, 1775-1776* (Scarborough, 1968); G. Stewart and G.A. Rawlyk, *A People Highly Favoured of God: The Nova Scotian Yankees and the American Revolution* (Toronto, 1972).

outport merchants, and those scratching a subsistence from land or sea differed dramatically. Diaries, letters and recollections are the starting point for investigation of these matters, but careful reconstruction of the material circumstances of individual lives by the analysis of wills and inventories is at least as important. To establish the matrices and rhythms of everyday activity — including the size and lay-out of the dwellings occupied, the tasks conducted in and around the home, and the technology used by men and women of different stations — is to reveal the blocks out of which landscapes were built, and to clarify the settings in which lives were spent. More than this, it is a step towards the sort of imaginative and stimulating interpretation that John Demos has provided for Plymouth Colony.²⁵ Recognizing the absence of private space in seventeenth-century dwellings, Demos investigated family organization and child-rearing practices to conclude that Old Colony settlers strove to repress conflict within the home. Perhaps, then, the demands of what we would consider crowded living through the long months of northeastern winters worked in similar ways to foster social conformity and non-aggressiveness among early Maritimers. Did not Thomas McCulloch's "Letters of Mephibosheth Stepsure" published in the *Acadian Recorder* of Halifax in 1821-22, stress the importance of home comforts and domestic harmony? Were not the satirical barbs of Sam Slick, the Yankee peddler, directed at Nova Scotians some fourteen years later for their lack of assertiveness and their failure to exploit the resources of their country as vigorously as possible?²⁶ Speculative as these hypotheses are, they raise fascinating questions that are potential springboards for the generation of new lines of inquiry.

According to Michael Zuckerman, the New England town meeting was the setting in which values of peace and harmony were articulated for public emulation; thus it framed the consensus by which communities existed.²⁷ But local government was exceedingly weak in the Maritime colonies, and the town was a far less important institution there than in New England. This raises intriguing questions. Addressed comparatively they might tell us much about the interpenetration of political and private spheres of conduct and about how these affect social organization and communal order.²⁸ Certainly any assessment of the cohesiveness, or otherwise, of community life in the eighteenth-century Maritimes would be most useful. Did the emasculation of the town meeting encourage the

25 J. Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (London, 1970).

26 McCulloch's writings were reprinted as *The Stepsure Letters* (Toronto, 1960); Haliburton's as *The Clockmaker* (Toronto, 1958).

27 M. Zuckerman, *Peaceable Kingdoms: New England Towns in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1970).

28 Elizabeth Mancke will address some of these questions in her Ph.D. dissertation for Johns Hopkins University, focussing on Machias, Maine and Liverpool, Nova Scotia.

growth of individualism on the new frontier? Although most agricultural settlers of the 1760s chose to dwell on one of the larger parcels of their scattered holdings, rather than on their town plots, their dispersal is no certain reflection of community decline. Community, after all, is a social web; nucleated settlement may have been incidental to its development. An accessible focus of community activity was perhaps the minimum physical prerequisite for the continued vitality of community spirit in its fullest sense. Did such nodes exist in the settlements of maritime British North America? Contemporary maps and plans might provide answers. Were town boundaries marked and maintained? Might churches have been self-conscious community foci? Perhaps webs of social interaction crossed the lines of territorial administration. Did the coming of Loyalists, or the revival inspired by Henry Alline, divide local populations and create factional communities within the bounds of single townships? Ultimately, of course, community life has several facets. Economic communities of barter exchange involving goods and services were probably not congruent with communities of social interaction.²⁹ Nor does the expression of community consensus depend entirely upon the vitality of a town meeting or its equivalent. Early in the nineteenth century, published apologues and other prose writing had a clear didactic intent.³⁰ Earlier, a surprisingly extensive body of poems — satirical, didactic, religious, eulogistic and lyric — found in manuscript, and in the periodicals and newspapers of the period served to “articulate and make intimate cultural values” in the new communities. This work characteristically sets individual feeling against a background of basic communal concerns. It stresses public civility and defines the matrix of social, political, moral and religious propriety.³¹ Thus it is an important reflection of the “special texture” of life in the region at the end of the eighteenth century, and should be an integral component of future attempts to understand the complex interrelationship of people and

29 D.C. Harvey, “The Struggle for the New England Form of Township Government in Nova Scotia,” *Canadian Historical Association Report* (1933), 15-22; J.S. Wood, “Village and Community in Early Colonial New England,” *Journal of Historical Geography*, 8 (1982), 333-46; T. Bender, *Community and Social Change in America* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1978); E.G. Nellis, “Work and Social Stability in pre-Revolutionary Massachusetts,” *Canadian Historical Association Historical Papers* (1981), 81-100; J.T. Lemon, “Spatial Order: Households in Local Communities and Regions,” and R.B. Sheridan, “The Domestic Economy,” in Green and Pole, eds., *Colonial British America...*, 86-122 and 43-85; G. Stewart, “Socio-Economic Factors in the Great Awakening: the Case of Yarmouth, Nova Scotia,” *Acadiensis*, 3 (1973), 18-34.

30 G. Wynn, “‘Deplorably Dark and Demoralized Lumberers’? Rhetoric and reality in early nineteenth century New Brunswick,” *Journal of Forest History*, 24 (1980), 168-87.

31 T.B. Vincent, “Eighteenth Century Poetry in Maritime Canada: problems of approach — a research report,” *Atlantic Provinces Literature Colloquium: The Marco Polo Papers*, I (Saint John, 1977), 13-23; T.B. Vincent, ed., *Narrative Verse Satire in Maritime Canada, 1779-1814* (Ottawa, 1978).

place in this corner of North America.

How, then, to proceed with the task of further reconstruction? Careful, detailed community studies, manageable in scale, and allowing exhaustive use of the available documentation, promise insight into many of the questions about which we know least. We cannot proceed without them. But nor can we assume that a series of community studies will define the framework of a new synthesis. Local studies are inevitably moulded by the sources from which they are hewn; they reflect the particular circumstances of their individual foci. Although their replication would provide great detail about particular settings and probably yield agreement on some substantive issues, it would likely leave us with a collection of largely unassimilable case studies. Only with difficulty have the many local studies from New England been integrated into more general statements about the evolution of that society, and the problems of generalization are likely to be even greater for the Maritimes, where populations and circumstances differed so considerably.

Rather than building from the bottom up, the most productive answer, at this juncture, may be to identify two or three unifying themes and to sharpen and refine them by reading down to the record of individual settlements. This probably implies, at least in part, that we move beyond the emphasis on spatial patterns that has constituted the recent orthodoxy of historical geography, and abandon the blinkers of traditional historical scholarship to seek a fuller knowledge of the past interrelations of people with their environments, and heighten our understanding of the evolving character of societies *and* places. With such a focus comes the prospect of engaging in a challenging interdisciplinary debate that illuminates human experience, and promises to generate essentially humanistic inquiries that contribute to our understanding of ourselves by offering a perspective on "the interwoven phenomena of the world of man."³² And this is a prospect that is enormously appealing as we seek to forge new and important insights from a fragmentary archival record and the disparate inquiries of several disciplines, in pursuit of a fuller grasp of this northeastern corner of America, where settlers wrestled to establish themselves and their institutions in a tough environment.

32 A. H. Clark, "First Things First" in R. E. Ehrenberg, ed., *Pattern and Process: Research in Historical Geography* (Washington, D.C., 1975), 12-3.