

## Future Directions in Planters Studies

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When I was asked to give a few concluding remarks about future directions for Planter Studies I thought I would begin with a brief introduction assessing why the Planters have been so conspicuously ignored in the writing of Canadian history. Unfortunately, Professor Rawlyk beat me to the punch and dealt with that topic in a far more complete and articulate way than I could have. I share with Professor Rawlyk the belief that the history of this region has been systematically marginalized and that the current generation of so-called national historians has shown little interest in an emerging and increasingly sophisticated regional historiography which ought to have reshaped traditional assumptions about the historical insignificance of Atlantic Canada.<sup>1</sup> (Actually I would judge from Esther Clark Wright's comments that, when it comes to the Canadian historical profession, "plus ça change.") I also agree with Professor Rawlyk that the very quality of the early scholarship, during what he once described as the first "golden age" of Atlantic regional scholarship, in particular the work of J.B. Brebner and Andrew Hill Clark, served to encourage the always mistaken belief that there was nothing pressing to be done in the field of Planter Studies.

But I also believe that there are two other factors which help to explain the relative obscurity into which the Planters have been cast. The first is the arrival of the Loyalists. It was the Loyalists who have been seen by generations of historians as the founding fathers of Canada. Partly this simply reflects the Upper Canadian bias of historians and it is hard to believe that if the first anglophone settlers in that colony had been Planters this neglect would have taken place. (But then what can you do with a province that does not even know when its own Bicentennial took place!) As Barry Cahill declared, the term Pre-Loyalist does indeed represent "a biased scholarly coinage" which has distorted the way in which we approach the studies of the Planters. To my horror I suddenly realized when he made that remark that I had used the term myself in a paper just sent to the *Journal of Canadian Studies*. In fact it is a difficult term to avoid if one wishes to describe all of the Pre-Revolutionary settlers. Yet it is, of course, a term that is essentially ahistorical since it assigns to the Planters an identity which they themselves never made — indeed which they could not make. There is a delicious irony here, of course. After all,

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<sup>1</sup> On this point see my "'Limited Identities' and Canadian Historical Scholarship: An Atlantic Provinces Perspective," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 23 (Spring/Summer 1988), 177-98.

the Loyalists themselves looked down on the Planters and dismissed them (as David Bell indicated this morning) as at worst disloyal and at best lukewarm subjects of the King. Loyalist establishments at Halifax and Fredericton set out to impose their ideological standards on the Planters and the other groups in the region whose arrival pre-dated their own. As J.M. Bumsted has pointed out, they failed and the official culture of the elite was only weakly superimposed on the vernacular cultures that existed in various parts of the region. Yet in Canadian historiography the Loyalists have had their victory posthumously for it has usually been assumed that the Loyalists did succeed in imposing their values upon the earlier inhabitants of the region, now systematically marginalized as the Pre-Loyalists.

There is also a second factor which explains the Loyalist victory. Both the Planters and the majority of the Loyalists had one thing in common. They were Americans. In fact, there was to be during the decades following the American Revolution a merging of the Pre- and Post-Revolutionary migrants from the Thirteen Colonies at both the elite and popular levels, partly promoted, I suspect, through intermarriage and partly by the fact that the two groups did share so many cultural attitudes and patterns. Yet this American-based culture was itself challenged in the nineteenth century by the arrival of a much larger migration of non-Americans from the British Isles. Years ago, in an unfortunately much-neglected article on "A Study in the Historical Demography of a Loyalist County," T.W. Acheson explored the impact of this migration on Charlotte County and demolished the myth that Charlotte County can be described as a Loyalist county.<sup>2</sup> I certainly do not want to be accused of some kind of demographic determinism but it seems to me clear that in the nineteenth century the older American culture in the Maritimes and Upper Canada was overwhelmed by a process of Anglicization as British immigrants, British capital, British technology and British cultural values poured into the region. But when the British North Americans (as they should now be called) were forced to create their own national institutions in the latter part of the nineteenth century it was, in part, to the Loyalist myth that they turned to justify their incipient nationalism, thus simultaneously reinforcing the significance of the Loyalists and the comparative insignificance of the Planters.

I have indulged in this lengthy (and I suspect controversial) preamble because I want to make some unorthodox suggestions about future directions for Planter Studies. The strength of this conference has been its focus on the original generation of Planters: who they were, where they

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2 T.W. Acheson, "A Study in the Historical Demography of a Loyalist County," *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, 1 (April 1968), 53-65.

came from, where they went and what kind of social institutions they established during the period of resettlement. As a number of papers have indicated there are still many questions to be answered about that period and a great deal of research to be completed. I suspect that my fellow panelists will have even more questions to add to that list. And I look forward with great enthusiasm to the book of essays that the organizers intend to produce based upon the Conference proceedings. But I disagree fundamentally with the member of the audience who queried why we should move beyond the period of Planter settlement. As a Canadian historian rather than an American colonial historian I am more interested in the post-Revolutionary history of the Planter communities than I am in their pre-Revolutionary origins. After all, the Planters established some of the most stable, resilient and homogeneous communities in Canada and if you doubt the validity of that statement look around you. I have never attended an academic conference in which there were so many interested participants from the local community. (Believe me, it did not happen when we held a series of lectures in Fredericton on the history of the Loyalists during the Bicentennial even though Fredericton is called the Loyalist city.) The reason for the popularity of this conference has little to do, I suspect, with the ability of the academics on the programme to reach out to a wider audience. What it does reflect is the persistence of so many descendants of the Planters in this region and the fact that so many of them are aware that they are the descendants of Planters. It is in this fact that the real significance of the Planters seems to me to lie: They Planted Well.

Therefore, while not abandoning further investigation into the initial period of settlement, I would like to see us move beyond that — to look at the evolution of the Planter communities over time. Can one talk even in the 1760s of a distinctly “Planter” culture or way of life? Did that culture survive the arrival of the later immigrants? Was there a substantial influx of Loyalists into these communities? Was there much intermarriage between the two groups? How do the fertility rates, the methods of soil cultivation, the commercial practices, the family organization of the Planter communities compare with other communities in the region? Many of these questions involve a systematic examination of the social history of the Planter communities but I would like to call for a much greater emphasis on the intellectual history of these communities. It may be a fact that the Planter communities were better able than other communities in the region to withstand the onslaught of Anglicization during the mid-nineteenth century. Certainly the work of George Rawlyk and David Bell suggest that. But, until detailed community studies are done of these communities in the nineteenth century, that can only remain an hypothesis.

I realize, of course, that I am outlining a programme of research that will take decades to complete but if there is to be ongoing programme of

Planter Studies at Acadia University, it is these questions that will have to be addressed. J.M. Bumsted suggested yesterday that we are here to authenticate the birth of a new ethnic group. If the Planters are to be interpreted in these terms (and I think they can be) we can and must not restrict our explorations to the first generation of settlers. For it is only by dealing with the longer term issue of the persistence and distinctiveness of the culture of the Planter communities that one can hope to assess the true place of the Planters in the Canadian mosaic and rescue them from their unmerited obscurity. This conference has begun that work but there is still a great deal to do.

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My aim today is to urge a more systematic and less impressionistic approach to Planter Studies. It is my contention that the Planters must be viewed as forming a distinct society which evolved as part of a historical continuum from the first settlement into the present and that this society must be analysed with this in mind.

Before pursuing this thesis, I wish to reflect on the writing of Nova Scotia histories in which the Planters have figured prominently. What I find striking about our provincial historiography is how, in two significant aspects, it is different from that of other provinces and the writing of national history.

The first important departure is the predominant role played by the Public Archives in Nova Scotia, from the 1930s when D.C. Harvey became provincial archivist to the present. The PANS contribution embraces not only a succession of staff, who saw no dividing line between their archival activities and the writing of history, but equally as notable, two or more generations of graduate students who studied under Harvey. To most of you, the work of Harvey, Margaret Ells, Marion Gilroy, James Martell, C.B. Fergusson and Phyllis Blakeley needs no further comment. With that great triumph of responsible government always held firmly in their sights, their mastery of sources and forceful presentations set a very high standard. I would refer you to the recently rediscovered thesis for the university of London of Margaret Ells (herself of Planter descendant) entitled: "The Development of Nova Scotia, 1782-1812." Begun in the 1930s and completed a decade later, it was regrettably never submitted for a PhD. As a work of scholarship, it ranks equal to that of J.B. Brebner and its comprehensiveness, in my opinion, perhaps surpasses that of Brebner. Also impressive is the work of C.B. Fergusson and Phyllis Blakeley.