

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.

Between the two of them they published 43 books and pamphlets, 134 articles and 59 entries in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*.

What the Harvey school did not produce in published form was a history of Nova Scotia for any particular period. There was no equivalent of W.S. MacNutt's *New Brunswick: A History, 1784-1867*. In fact, the search for modern, published interpretations of our history over a period of time has to begin and end with what is in MacNutt's, *The Atlantic Provinces 1712-1857*. This lamentable situation is paradoxical because of the volume of output in published articles, monographs and theses was not rectified by the university historians who entered the field beginning in the 1960s. The sole exception has to be J. Murray Beck's *Government of Nova Scotia*, and more recently, his *Politics of Nova Scotia*. But these are concerned strictly with political history and constitutional development.

Contemporary historians have chosen to examine particular aspects of Nova Scotian history, often more as a theoretical exercise than as a concern for the writing of what I choose to call basic history. There has been an over-concern with methodology and an avoidance of the comprehensiveness which tells a coherent story of Nova Scotian society over a defined period of time. It is this approach, one of comprehensiveness over time, that I wish to advocate for Planter Studies. Other than what has become an obsession with their eighteenth-century religiosity, little has been published on the Planters since Brebner.

A welcome new start, however, has been made, I hope, with Debra McNabb's thesis on land holding patterns in early Horton Township. If another geographer, Andrew Hill Clark, had published his post-1755 research, we would view the Planters much differently than we do. To start with, we would see them forming a reasonably distinct society, and be able to mark out those aspects of continuity and change over time that can give history meaning for contemporary society with its increasing rootlessness. When I speak of comprehensiveness, I mean all aspects: economic, social, political, religions, cultural, architectural and so forth. Furthermore, there is a need to get away from the all too great a reliance on what I call impressionist evidence. Instead, we should be immersing ourselves in the mountains of statistical and similar evidence that is very much available. We must systematically analyze and correlate census data on individuals and families. Poll-books, numerous petitions for sundry concerns, deeds, court and probate records will also yield valuable evidence. Let us turn to these sources using, where applicable, computer technology to provide an all-inclusive profile of Planter society over time.

In my remaining time, I wish to use examples of the approach I am advocating. To begin with land holding and occupation. The common portrayal of Planter townships in western Nova Scotia is that of a rural population, almost all of whom were engaged in farming their own lands. The image is that of Joseph Howe's yeoman of Hants County, never

faltering in support for reform. Well, a break-down of the 1838s census of Windsor Township shows that 41% of the heads of families were classed as labourers, only 22% as farmers. In the heated Brandy Election of 1830, for which the Windsor poll book survives, no more than 30% of the heads of households, in fact, voted. Our image holds up reasonably well in the case of Granville Township, where, in the same period, farmers accounted for about 53% of all the heads of households, and labourers only for 12%. Here also the poll book for the 1840 election survived, and a breakdown of votes by occupation is possible. In Granville we get a high percentage of turn-out for that election (70% or over). It is interesting to note that it was the farmer vote which gave a Tory victory in that election over the Reformers.

Much has been written on the various education acts passed leading up to the Free School Act of 1864. Yet there has been no attempt to determine systematically the levels of literacy. I mentioned earlier numerous signed petitions. I suggest these can form the basis for giving good indications of literacy, by using the style of signatures as a criterion. Where an "X" or a mark is used, obviously the individual was illiterate. If, however, the signature appears good, it is a fair assumption that he was able to read and write. I have used this technique, I think, with interesting results when attempting to determine the educational level of all 300 M.L.A.'s who were elected between 1785-1847. So few had attended university or could be classed as such professionals as doctors or lawyers which we assume are literate, that I had to find some way to describe the education of the vast majority. In examining the signatures of all 300, I found the vast majority signed their names with firm, fluid hands. Only a small number signed their names with a shaky scrawl, and none with an "X." I suspect that if we systematically analyze the signatures of Planters and their descendants, using many of these signed petitions, we could well be surprised by the literacy levels. We could then start investigating how these were reached in a society where schooling was supposedly so haphazard an affair. You can use the census material, the poll books, the signatures on petitions, and so on to derive an integrated political, economic, social and cultural profile of a fair segment of Planter Society at different time periods. Furthermore it is possible to compare these profiles with other societies as the Scots of Pictou County, the Germans in Lunenburg County, and the Loyalist descendants at Shelburne.

In summary, I believe that it is time we left the eighteenth century and the Newlights behind. We need now to exploit to the full the ample sources for systematically analyzing nineteenth-century Planter Society while comparing these results with those of other distinct Nova Scotian societies.