

Canadian Biography and the Search for Joseph Howe

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REVIEWS/REVUES

Canadian Biography and the Search for Joseph Howe

ENGLISH-CANADIAN HISTORIANS have long had a love affair with the biographical approach to history.¹ In fact, prior to the First World War biography was the preferred form of writing history in Canada. Few of the publications produced during this period are of much value today. They were written according to a rigid formula, were based upon little or no research, were completely uncritical of their subjects, and were governed by a set of conventions which limited what could be revealed about the private lives of their subjects. In the 1920s a new breed of professional historians revamped the biographical form.² Their studies were based on meticulous research into primary sources, were much less hagiographic than their predecessors, and emphasized the times rather than the lives of their subjects. But frequently these became totally depersonalized accounts; the protagonists lost their personalities and became merely products of their times. The most damning critic of this tendency was Donald Creighton, who stressed that the basic function of a biographer must be to portray the course of an individual's life as it evolved over time. In the 1950s Creighton published his highly imaginative biography of John A. Macdonald, which quickly "became the standard against which succeeding lives were measured".³

Since the 1950s there has been a veritable flood of biographies. Most of the major and many of the minor pre-Confederation politicians have been the subject of scholarly studies, and several of the Central Canadian politicians — including the leading fathers of Confederation — have even been honoured with two-volume treatments of their lives. The Maritimes, as usual, have been less well served. In an earlier period when the struggle for responsible government was seen as the central event in Canadian history at least token attention was paid to the Maritimes. But the Maritime politicians appeared neither as colourful nor as controversial as their Central Canadian counterparts and they never attracted the same scholarly interest as John Strachan or William Lyon Mackenzie. Following the Second World War, as Canadian historians shifted their focus to the Confederation era, Maritimers remained less attractive as subjects because they were seen as playing a less significant — often indeed a negative — role in the events which led to Confederation. The growth of interest in regional studies in the 1970s revived interest in the Maritimes but from a very

1 This has not been true of French-Canadian academics. See B. Vigod, "Biography and Political Culture in Quebec", *Acadiensis*, VII, I (Autumn, 1977), p. 141.

2 See Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing: 1900 to 1970* (Toronto, 1970), pp. 218-9.

3 Robert Craig Brown, "Biography in Canadian History", *Historical Papers/Communications historiques* (1980), p. 5. For another assessment of the current state of biographical studies in Canada, see Donald Swainson, "Trends in Canadian Biography: Recent Historical Writing", *Queen's Quarterly*, 87, no. 3 (Autumn, 1980), pp. 413-29.

different perspective. Earlier studies had concentrated on those who supported Confederation — particularly Charles Tupper and Leonard Tilley about both of whom theses were written but not published.⁴ However, the newer works, perhaps reflecting a growing disillusionment among scholars living within the Atlantic region, focused on anti-Confederates such as Timothy Warren Anglin of New Brunswick, Cornelius Howatt of Prince Edward Island and, of course, Joseph Howe of Nova Scotia.⁵

Joseph Howe has always held a special fascination for Nova Scotia historians. During his lifetime Howe began to prepare for posterity by largely preparing for publication a two-volume collection of *The Speeches and Public Letters of Joseph Howe* (1858), although it appeared under the name of Willam Annand. Fifty years later Joseph A. Chisolm issued an expanded edition (1909). In 1875 the Rev. George M. Grant wrote four articles for the *Canadian Monthly* on Howe and in 1904 they were issued as a biography of *Joseph Howe*. Grant was commissioned to write a biography of Howe for the *Makers of Canada* series but died before he had completed his task and James W. Longley eventually prepared the volume on *Joseph Howe* (1906). Grant's son, William Lawson Grant, prepared *The Tribune of Nova Scotia: A Chronicle of Joseph Howe* (1920) for the *Chronicles of Canada* series. Both Grants and Longley subscribed to the Whig approach to history which was so pervasive during this period and they were full of praise for Howe the reformer, although they quickly skimmed over the later years of Howe's life.⁶ Better researched and more directly critical was James Roy's *Joseph Howe: A Study in Achievement and Frustration* (1935) which portrayed Howe as "rather a great man manquée than a great man positive" (p. 309), primarily because of Howe's opposition to Confederation. Like the earlier biography by W.L. Grant, Roy explained Howe's approach to Confederation by his disappointment at having to play second-fiddle to Sir Charles Tupper. Yet, for all his faults, Howe continued to occupy a special place in the heart of Nova Scotians. At the urging of Angus L. Macdonald, D.C. Harvey prepared *The Heart of Howe: Selections from the Letters and Speeches of Joseph Howe* (1939) so that, in the words of Macdonald's foreword, "the youth of this province will gain pleasure and inspiration...from the sayings and writings of Nova Scotia's most eloquent son". Harvey's successor as provincial

4 Alan W. MacIntosh, "The Career of Sir Charles Tupper in Canada 1864-1900", Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1960, Carl Wallace, "The Career of Sir Samuel Leonard Tilley: A Political Biography", Ph.D. thesis, University of Alberta, 1972.

5 See William M. Baker, *Timothy Warren Anglin, 1822-1896: Irish Catholic Canadian* (Toronto, 1977) and David Weale, *Cornelius Howatt: Farmer and Island Patriot* (Summerside, 1974). J.M. Beck contributed a volume on *Joseph Howe: Voice of Nova Scotia* (Toronto, 1964) to the Carleton Library series and George Rawlyk published *Joseph Howe: Opportunist? Man of Vision? Frustrated Politician?* (Toronto, 1974) in the *Issues in Canadian History* series. Both books were sympathetic to Howe's opposition to Confederation.

6 On the Whig approach see K.N. Windsor, "Historical Writing in Canada (to 1920)" in C.F. Klinck, ed., *Literary History of Canada* (2nd. ed., Toronto, 1976), I, pp. 244-6.

archivist, Bruce Fergusson, published *Joseph Howe of Nova Scotia* (1973), another laudatory biography. Neither of these brief studies superceded Roy's biography as the standard work on Howe.

The roots of a revisionist interpretation took shape in 1960 when J. Murray Beck published the first in a series of articles which challenged Roy's assessment of Howe.⁷ Twenty years later Beck has finally completed his own two-volume biography of the man he considers "was, and is, the greatest Nova Scotian": *Joseph Howe: Volume I: Conservative Reformer 1804-1848* and *Joseph Howe: Volume II: The Briton Becomes Canadian* (Kingston and Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1982 and 1983). Beck's achievement is impressive. He has meticulously examined the Howe Papers and the other collections of private papers in the Public Archives of Nova Scotia and he has scoured the provincial newspapers for every reference to Howe over nearly half a century. One might quibble with the secondary sources he has consulted. His "Note on Sources" at the end of each volume is rather terse but he does not appear to have utilized the general literature on the period nor any unpublished theses dealing with Nova Scotia, except those written at Dalhousie University.⁸ Beck would undoubtedly argue in his own defence that these criticism are irrelevant, that his purpose was simply to "tell the whole story, much of it through Howe's own words". As Beck admits in his preface, the problem with this approach is that one risks "cluttering up the book with detail".

There is a second and more serious problem with Beck's approach. He emphasizes the role of individuals in shaping events and the role of casual and unpredictable factors in shaping individual personality and rejects any form of structural determinism. Thus Beck's Howe is very much a unique and unusual personality driven by an unceasing search for challenge and adventure that sets him apart from other men. As a result the biography is essentially a study of the interplay between this unique character and the changing circumstances he confronts during a long and multifaceted career. The danger, of course, with stressing the idiosyncratic nature of the character and the circumstances he confronts is that the narrative may lose cohesion and become a series of discrete episodes. Donald Creighton solved this problem by making his Macdonald a larger-than-life figure who personified the dream of a transcontinental nation. In his sophisticated study of George Brown, J.M.S. Careless resolved a similar problem by making Brown represent the metropolitan ambitions of Toronto and the sectional interests of western Upper Canada. Beck is less successful in finding a grand theme around which to organize his narrative.

Beck is particularly concerned to correct the image of Howe — perpetuated

7 See J.M. Beck, "Joseph Howe: Opportunist or Empire-builder?" *Canadian Historical Review*, XLI (1960), pp. 185-202.

8 For example, he does not refer to such obvious theses as MacIntosh's study of Tupper or D.A. Muise's "Elections and Party Developments: Federal Politics in Nova Scotia, 1867-1887", Ph.D. thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1972.

by Roy — as essentially a pragmatist motivated by an intense ambition. Beck's Howe is a man of principle, a dedicated imperialist whose intellectual development was shaped by the influence of his father, John Howe, a Massachusetts Loyalist who instilled in his son an almost mystical reverence for the British Empire and for British constitutional and social forms. Thus there is a thread of consistency in Howe's life from his early advocacy of responsible government as a device "eminently simple and thoroughly British" to his rejection of Confederation because it would break the umbilical cord between Britain and Nova Scotia. Howe's search for imperial patronage then becomes part of "a consistent concept of empire" (II, p. 99). One may question elements of this interpretation. Beck would have benefited from reading more of the recent literature on the roots and significance of Loyalist ideology in the United States. It is simply not sufficient to say that "What counted with John Howe was the British heritage, the contributions that Britons had made to human achievement over the centuries in politics, the arts, sciences, literature, and the like" (p. 9), since the American patriots shared with the Loyalists a reverence for their British heritage and for British constitutional forms. And it is ahistorical to explain John Howe's Loyalism by reference to his son's "scattered references over the years" (I, p. 9), particularly since the younger Howe frequently "gave free rein to his imagination" (p. 8) in reconstructing his family history. One suspects that John Howe's religious beliefs played a large part in his decision to become a Loyalist, since as William Nelson pointed out many years ago, religious minorities everywhere *tended* to support the Loyalist cause and the Sandemans were a small religious minority in Massachusetts. It is also dangerous to assume that self-interest did not play a major part in John Howe's decision. Although it may not have been Beck's responsibility to analyze the roots of that decision, one wishes he had grappled with the way in which Loyalism was transmuted into an indigeneous ideology with a strong appeal to native Nova Scotians like Howe.⁹ Heredity may have been a factor in the transmission of Loyalist attitudes but not all of the children of Loyalists adhered to the political and cultural values of their fathers. Beck's emphasis upon what he has elsewhere described as "a reverential, almost mystical attitude toward the British connection" underestimates the bonds of self-interest which persuaded the members of the colonial elite to collaborate in sustaining the imperial tie.¹⁰

It is particularly unfortunate that Beck did not pursue this line of inquiry with greater analytical rigour because it might have provided a more successful means of reconciling Howe the imperial advocate with Howe the Nova Scotian patriot. Like earlier writers, Beck emphasizes Howe's commitment to, and love for, his native province. Howe's "complete rapport with Nova Scotia and Nova

9 Unfortunately very little has been written about this subject in the Maritimes, but see Murray Barkley, "The Loyalist Tradition in New Brunswick", *Acadiensis*, IV, 2 (Spring, 1975), pp. 3-45.

10 The quote is from Beck's introduction to *Joseph Howe: Voice of Nova Scotia*, p. 2.

Scotians" (I, p. 317), Beck argues, accounted in large part for his popularity among his fellow Nova Scotians. Of course, it was possible to reconcile Nova Scotian patriotism and imperial nationalism, just as later in the century it was possible to reconcile Canadian patriotism with imperial nationalism. But there was an inherent tension between Howe the Nova Scotian populist and Howe the conservative imperialist. This tension was reflected in Howe's political beliefs. Beck attempts to get around Howe's inconsistencies by describing him as a "conservative reformer", but as an explanatory device this concept is too ambiguous to be entirely successful. One is left with the image of a man with divided loyalties — "un être divisé", as Fernand Ouellet once described Louis Joseph Papineau.

This inner conflict comes out most clearly in Volume I of the biography, which deals with Howe's life until he became provincial secretary in 1848. Beck's detailed narrative contains a wealth of new information but his interpretation differs only marginally from earlier works, especially Chester Martin's classic, *Empire and Commonwealth: Studies in Governance and Self-Government in Canada* (1929). Like the earlier Whig writers, Beck adopts a teleological approach. He views the growth of self-government as natural and "inevitable" (I, p. 316) and politics as a struggle between the forces of reaction and the forces of progress. He wastes little time and even less sympathy on the Conservatives and perpetuates a Good Guys - Bad Guys stereotype. There is no evidence that he has read the considerable body of literature on Upper Canada which contains a balanced assessment of the "Family Compact" and argues that the conservatives played a positive as well as a negative role in the development of the colony.¹¹ At times Beck applies a double standard. The Tories are castigated for distributing patronage in a flagrantly partisan way and for clinging to office after their defeat, but when the Liberals demand control over patronage, Beck argues that their demand was a logical concomitant of responsible government. When Howe argues that no colonial official should receive more than £600 per annum, Beck nods his head approvingly, but when Howe receives a salary of £800 this inconsistency is glossed over, as are Howe's dubious financial manipulations as collector of excise (I, p. 306). Beck admits Howe was "not averse to engaging in sharp practices to serve the needs of his family" (I, p. 21), but he is much more critical of the conservatives than the reformers. Undoubtedly Beck would argue that he is merely reflecting Howe's vision of reality, but while Howe was entitled to be a partisan, the historian is not.

The whole question of Howe's attitude to party and party organization is

11 See, for example, S.F. Wise, "Upper Canada and the Conservative Tradition" in Edith Firth, ed., *Profiles of a Province* (Toronto, 1967), pp. 20-33, "Conservatism and Political Development: The Canadian Case", *South Atlantic Quarterly*, LXIX, 2 (Spring, 1970), pp. 226-43, and "Liberal Consensus or Ideological Battleground: Some Reflections on the Hartz Thesis", *Historical Papers/Communications historiques* (1974), pp. 1-16.

dealt with somewhat superficially. Well into the 1830s anti-partisan attitudes lingered on in Britain and the United States and it is hardly surprising that such attitudes were deeply rooted in Nova Scotia. Howe's achievement was to overcome this prejudice against parties. He assisted in the creation of the Reform Party after 1836 and in organizing the Reform victory of 1847. Whether Beck is right to claim that Howe was "almost single-handedly" (I, p. 317) responsible for these developments is more problematic. Beck seems to assume that a provincial constituency existed by the 1840s and that Howe could direct "public opinion" through his newspaper. But in an era when literacy was not widespread and communications were underdeveloped, it seems unlikely that Howe could have influenced a very large proportion of the population. It is much more likely that his personal influence was limited to specific regions and interests within the colony. Unfortunately Beck rarely describes the size or strength of the various factions which composed the Conservative and Reform parties nor does he relate events in the Assembly to reactions in the constituencies.

Despite its many weaknesses the crude notion of a conflict between the forces of privilege and a popular movement does give coherence to the first volume of Beck's study. But his failure to utilize any theoretical framework to explain the partisan divisions that existed in the colony leads to anarchy in the second volume. Apparently in Howe's (or rather Beck's) Nova Scotia, politics was (and may still be) essentially pragmatic. The parties were mere electoral machines without any underlying principles or clearcut divisions between them; they were temporary alliances of specific interest groups while elections were merely "a series of constituency contests" (II, p. 95). This interpretation may be correct (although Beck does not apply it consistently since he also assumes Howe had a province-wide constituency based upon a somewhat vaguely defined set of principles). But without much more detailed studies of voting behaviour in the Assembly and in the constituencies, and of the significance of such ethnocultural factors as ethnicity and religion in shaping voting patterns, Beck's assumptions remain just that. Certainly the American literature on the politics of this period reveals greater coherence than Beck suggests existed in Nova Scotia.¹² Again Beck is overly influenced by Howe's vision of reality; those issues which were only of peripheral concern to Howe — even such an important issue as temperance — receive cursory treatment in Beck's account.

Beck may be excused for not attempting to write the definitive political history of mid-19th century Nova Scotia, but he can fairly be criticized for adopting an episodic approach which fragments Howe. Although we are given glimpses — sometimes tantalizingly brief glimpses — of Howe's views on a host of issues, Beck does not attempt to blend these views together into an integrated

12 See James Roger Sharp, "The Political Culture of Middle-Period United States", *The Canadian Review of American Studies*, 15, no. 1 (Spring, 1984), pp. 49-62 and Paul Goodman, "Putting Some Class Back into Political History: 'The Transformation of Culture' and the Crisis in American Political History", *Reviews in American History*, 12, no. 1 (March, 1984), pp. 80-88.

world-view.¹³ The weakness of Beck's approach is seen most clearly in the chapters on the "Seeds of Racial-Cultural Conflict" and "Sectarian Politics Prevails". Beck is probably correct in arguing that Howe's attempt to form a union of Protestants "resulted neither from a fit of uncontrollable anger nor primarily from a determination to regain office". But his own interpretation — that "Several of his [Howe's] basic convictions — including his immense loyalty to Britain and his profound distrust of organized religion — came into play in the working out of a genuinely traumatic situation" (II, p. 121) — begs too many questions. Like Brown, Howe appears to have been deeply influenced by a number of anti-Catholic (and anti-Irish) attitudes that were accepted by Liberals on both sides of the Atlantic in the 19th century and it is more important to understand why Howe was susceptible to such ideas than it is to seek reasons to explain them away.¹⁴ Of course, Howe was a complex man and some of his views — particularly on religion and on temperance — appear to have been somewhat idiosyncratic. But unless one reverts to an interpretation of Howe as motivated by immediate self-interest there must be some consistency in his political stances and some larger intellectual framework into which he can be fitted, however uncomfortably.

The strongest section of the second volume deals with Howe's opposition to Confederation. Building on his earlier articles, Beck shows that Howe's decision to oppose Confederation was based not upon jealousy at having to play second-fiddle to Charles Tupper but that it can be justified upon sound and credible grounds. Beck puts to rest the myth that Howe created the anti-Confederate movement but assigns to Howe a key role in designing the strategy adopted by the anti-Confederates — a strategy doomed to fail because it rested upon an appeal to London using the argument least likely to convince the British Government to abandon its support for Confederation. Beck fairly bristles with justifiable resentment at the treatment his fellow Nova Scotians received from the British Government. If there is a weakness in Beck's discussion, it is his failure to place the Confederation debate in Nova Scotia within some broader theoretical context. Beck may not like Del Muiise's argument that the struggle for Confederation was between those committed to the old economy of wood, wind and sail and the proponents of a more modern industrial economy based upon the expansion of the province's coal and iron industries,¹⁵ but he ought to have confronted it more directly. Similarly, he deals only very indirectly with the roots of the pervasive localism in Nova Scotia that accounted for much of the opposition to the highly centralized constitution imposed upon the province in 1867. And he deals even more generally with the reasons which led many Nova

13 As J.M.S. Careless did in his *Brown of the Globe*, 2 vols. (Toronto, 1959, 1963).

14 For an attempt to relate such attitudes to a wider world-view, see Robert Kelly, *The Transatlantic Persuasion: The Liberal-Democratic Mind in the Age of Gladstone* (New York, 1969).

15 Delphin A. Muiise, "The Federal Election of 1867 in Nova Scotia: An Economic Interpretation", *Collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society*, XXXVI (1968), p. 330.

Scotians to agree to that constitution. Therefore, his conclusion that it was the Fenian scare which persuaded the Nova Scotian Assembly to vote for Confederation must remain inadequate. It may be, in fact, that the threat of invasion merely provided a convenient justification for voting for Confederation, just as the undemocratic way in which the measure was imposed on Nova Scotia provided a convenient justification for many of the anti-Confederates.

The most serious weakness in Beck's treatment of Confederation is his tendency once again to apply a double standard. Just as in Volume I J.W. Johnston was assigned the role of Howe's alter ego and became the embodiment of evil, so in Volume II Charles Tupper fulfills that function. Howe, Ken Pryke has noted, "did not understand Tupper and regarded him merely as an ambitious speculator, who leapt from expedient to expedient, hoping that patronage would be a panacea for all problems".¹⁶ This criticism could be made of Beck, who is not prepared to extend to Tupper's motives the same benefit of the doubt that he extends to Howe's. Yet Beck shows how ruthlessly Howe used patronage after he was co-opted by Macdonald to bring the moderate anti-Confederates into line. Moreover, it is at least arguable that while there was nothing inherently contradictory or unpredictable about Howe's decision to oppose Confederation, there was nothing inevitable about his opposition either. During the 1850s Howe showed repeatedly that he was willing — indeed eager — to abandon Nova Scotia for greener pastures elsewhere in the British Empire. If, as Beck argues convincingly, Howe's opposition to Confederation arose primarily out of his belief that Confederation would lead to the dismemberment of the Empire, then it probably would not have been difficult for the British Government, if it had wooed Howe, to have convinced him that Confederation was indeed in the interests of the Empire, if not of Nova Scotia. It certainly did not prove difficult for the new federal government to win his loyalty. If Howe had lived, Beck predicts, he would quickly have become "a powerful spokesman of Canadian possibilities" (II, p. 290). If Beck's interpretation is correct (and one fears it is), then Howe's stature as a Nova Scotian and as a defender of regional interests is much diminished.

On balance, then, Beck's biography of Howe contains valuable new information and insights into a variety of topics and should inspire further research, particularly into the dark ages of Nova Scotian history in the 19th century — the period between the formal concession of responsible government and the struggle over Confederation. It is probably unfair to ask for more. And yet it is difficult not to come away from this biography without a sense that important areas of Howe's life remain to be examined by scholars not quite so wedded to traditional methodology.

During the past few decades historians have begun to draw upon the discipline of psychology for insights into human motivation and behaviour. Many

16 Kenneth G. Pryke, *Nova Scotia and Confederation 1864-74* (Toronto, 1979), p. 12.

historians continue to view psychohistory with justifiable scepticism.¹⁷ After all, the working premise of such studies — that the primary sources of human behaviour lie hidden beneath the surface of consciousness — is incompatible with the traditional rules of historical evidence. The psychohistorian sees the documentary record as a mere base of operations and is constantly drawn “away from the realm of fact into that of inference”.¹⁸ Psychohistory is often crudely reductionist and deterministic and underestimates the significance of social forces and situational imperatives. One may legitimately query the value of imposing modern psychological models upon past cultures. Nonetheless, psychological insights can also be extremely useful in exploring the private lives of public figures. In the case of Howe, perhaps fortunately, there is little information about his childhood and so there seems little danger of anyone evolving a dubious psychoanalytic interpretation of his character. But one suspects that a “softer” psychobiographical approach could yield valuable insights. There is, for example, a growing body of literature dealing with generational conflict in the early 19th century and with the relationship between Victorian fathers and their sons. The literature stresses that frequently children struck at the very basis of the father’s moral authority by rejecting the religious — usually Puritan — values which upheld or reinforced that authority.¹⁹ One can not help but notice that as a child Howe was very much under his father’s influence, that he ultimately rejected the Puritan faith of John Howe, and that until his father’s death he remained reluctant to avow his reform principles or to enter politics. There may, in fact, have been a good deal more tension between Howe and his father than Howe was prepared to admit. In this area psychological inquiry may offer a promising line of re-interpretation.

Recent psychohistorical studies have also begun to stress the degree of change that takes place in an individual’s personality over time. Traditionally, following what they viewed as the lessons of Freud, historians have looked for the roots of behavioural patterns established in childhood and early adolescence which might explain later patterns of behaviour. But modern psychoanalysis, under the influence of Carl Jung, has moved away from a narrow focus on childhood development and its influence on adulthood toward a re-evaluation of the impact of social and exterior cultural forces on behavioural patterns.²⁰ The implication of this theoretical approach is that individuals do change over the

17 For a balanced assessment see Donald Swainson, “Neurosis and Causality in Canadian History”, *Queen’s Quarterly*, 89, no. 3 (Autumn, 1982), pp. 611-6.

18 Don E. Fehrenbacher, “In Quest of the Psychological Lincoln”, *Reviews in American History*, 11, no. 1 (March, 1983), p. 12.

19 See Steven Mintz, *A Prison of Expectations: The Family in Victorian Culture* (New York, 1983), especially ch. 5. For a Maritime example of the application of some of the newer literature on the Victorian family, see J.M. Bumsted, “The Household and Family of Edward Jarvis, 1828-1852”, *The Island Magazine*, 14 (Fall-Winter 1983), pp. 22-8.

20 See Daniel J. Levinson *et al.*, *The Seasons of a Man’s Life* (New York, 1978), pp. 4-6, 24-7, 41-2.

course of their lives and behavioural patterns are not consistent from birth to death. More controversial is the suggestion that every individual must pass through a series of specific age-linked stages during which psychological as well as physical changes take place. If the thrust of this literature is correct and if it can be applied to past cultures, then the traditional approach to biography may have to be rethought. Perhaps it is anachronistic to see Howe as suffering a mid-life crisis in 1850 when he began to take stock of his life and became "impatient to turn to something more challenging and innovative" (II, p. 26). But one does have the feeling that the Howe of the 1860s was not motivated by the same drives and ambitions as the Howe of the 1830s and 1840s; the Howe who struggled for responsible government was not the Howe who struggled against Confederation. J.A. Roy perhaps intuitively sensed this fact and his biography of Howe, for all its faults, may for this reason still be read with interest.

Modern psychoanalytic theory at least forces biographies to confront the difficult task of integrating a person's private and public lives into a holistic account. It also brings to the forefront questions about sexuality and family relationships which historians have traditionally ignored either because they felt such issues were unsuitable for public discussion or because they felt they were trivial and unimportant. Beck cannot be accused of ignoring such questions. He is concerned, for example, to defend Howe against charges of sexual promiscuity. Beck admits Howe fathered one illegitimate child before marriage but he dismisses as "sheer folklore" the stories of Howe's "peopling the province with illegitimate" children and in a somewhat ambiguous statement declares that Howe "*appears to have sown most of his wild oats before his marriage*" (I, p. 43; my italics). One comes away with the feeling that something has been left unsaid or that at the very least Beck has downplayed the significance of Howe's sexuality.²¹ Equally quickly Beck passes over — one might even say glosses over — Howe's habit of telling "coarse" stories. As one reviewer has already suggested, "the frequent use of down-to-earth language and even sexual allusion" may have been "a device that Howe used to establish a deep relationship with his audience".²² Alternatively an examination of these stories — we are given no examples in Beck's study — may also reveal a good deal about the sexual preconceptions and values of Howe and his contemporaries.

Any future biographer of Howe will certainly want to devote a great deal more attention to Howe's relationships with his wife and children and his attitude toward them. A number of years ago Barbara Roberts legitimately criticized Donald Creighton for casting Macdonald's wives in the role of "historical villains".²³ Beck avoids this pitfall but he still begins with the as-

21 Robert Baldwin has recently been reassessed from such a perspective. See Michael S. Cross and Robert L. Fraser "The waste that lies before me": The Public and Private Worlds of Robert Baldwin", *Historical Papers/Communications historiques* (1983), pp. 164-83.

22 Ian McKay, "The People's Enlightenment", *New Maritimes*, vol. 2, no. 7 (April 1984), p. 15.

23 Barbara Roberts, "They Drove Him to Drink": Donald Creighton's Macdonald and his Wives",

sumption that a wife's role is to be a "helpmate" to her husband and he judges the activities of Susan Ann Howe solely from this perspective. Yet she appears to have been a remarkable woman in her own right. Not only did she run the household and the family businesses during Howe's frequent and lengthy absences, but she also assumed primary responsibility for caring for the ten children to whom she gave birth. Howe, on the other hand, appears to have paid remarkably little attention to those children. At one point he dismissed Sue Ann as "no great reason[er]" (I, p. 221) and he left her in virtual poverty, although whether he did so out of carelessness or callousness is not clear. Beck touches only briefly and without comment on Howe's attitude toward women (I, p. 54), but a reading of Howe's lengthy essay on "The Moral Influence of Women" shows how deeply he was committed to the Victorian doctrine of separate spheres. In that 1836 lecture Howe dismisses "the more reckless and daring apostles of the rights of women" and it is therefore not surprising that the first reform government, of which Beck claims Howe was the guiding spirit, stripped women with property of their right to vote in 1851.²⁴ But Beck doesn't discuss issues of gender. In fact, he continually describes Nova Scotia as having "universal suffrage" during this period.

Beck also skirts around the issue of class. He continually refers to Howe as representative of the "middle classes" of the colony, but he does not emphasize the role of class in explaining many of Howe's attitudes, such as his desire to restrict voting rights to men of property. Beck is particularly concerned to show that Howe's persistent pursuit of office was not attributable "to selfish interest or the hope of financial rewards".²⁵ Yet perhaps he tries too hard. In the early 19th century most men identified their own self-advancement with the progress of the community or class they claimed to represent and they saw no conflict of interest between their private and public roles. Howe apparently had no difficulty in reconciling the two in his own mind. Unfortunately it is not clear precisely how Howe should be interpreted in class terms. One commentator has suggested that Howe must be viewed from the perspective of the "self-made, independent producers, not yet firmly divided into classes of employers and employees".²⁶ But an argument could also be made that Howe must rather be seen as a member of the *nouveau riche* entrepreneurial class of colonial Halifax which was aggressively expanding its metropolitan influence over the Nova Scotian hinterland. In other words Howe was the George Brown of Nova Scotia and, like the latter, possessed a sense, however inchoate, of more modern class distinctions. Certainly Howe's reaction to the Gourlay shanty incident (II, pp. 110-

Canada: An Historical Magazine, vol. 3, no. 2 (Dec. 1975), p. 64.

24 Howe's essay is reprinted in M.G. Parks, ed., *Joseph Howe: Poems and Essays* (Toronto, 1973), pp. 248-75. See also John Garner, *The Franchise and Politics in British North America 1755-1867* (Toronto, 1969), p. 155.

25 Beck, "Joseph Howe: Opportunist or Empire-builder?", p. 202.

26 McKay, "The People's Enlightenment", p. 15.

4) will support a class as well as an ethnoreligious interpretation and so will Howe's commitment to railway-building and his desire to bring in cheap Irish labourers (or at least ones who knew their proper place in society).²⁷ Moreover, the co-partners bill which he supported in 1848 appears to have been a clear piece of class legislation (II, p. 9). What we need is a clearer picture of Howe's financial interests, an assessment of his attitude toward that ambiguous profession of journalism, and a more detailed description of his personal life-style before we can identify the influence of class-consciousness on Howe's behaviour.²⁸

It would be unfair to condemn Beck for not doing what he did not set out to do. Within its own terms this is a satisfying book. But it will not end the search for the definitive biography of Howe. How could it? Each generation re-writes its history and Howe will undoubtedly retain his fascination to future generations of Nova Scotian historians who will apply new questions and open new lines of inquiry. One thing is certain. Much of the groundwork for any future study of Howe has been laid by Beck in this careful and meticulously researched biography.

P.A. BUCKNER

27 Howe's reaction to the Gourlay shanty episode was a typical response to expressions of discontent by impoverished Irish labourers. See Ruth Bleasdale, "Class Conflict on the Canals of Upper Canada in the 1840s", *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 7 (Spring, 1981), pp. 10-39.

28 Good examples of the kind of examination that are necessary can be seen in Brian Young, *George-Etienne Cartier: Montreal Bourgeois* (Kingston and Montreal, 1981) and J.K. Johnston, "John A. Macdonald", in J.M.S. Careless, ed., *The Pre-Confederation Premiers: Ontario Government Leaders, 1841-1867* (Toronto, 1980), pp. 197-245.

Louisbourg Revisited

MORE THAN 20 YEARS AGO, when I began research for my Ph.D. dissertation on New England and Louisbourg in the 1740s, my supervisor Mason Wade felt that with my interest in 18th century Nova Scotia such a thesis would provide the base for a series of studies dealing with the so-called "French Gibraltar of North America". I could see myself concentrating for the rest of my academic life on Louisbourg but always within a North American historiographical context.

When I began my research in New England, I soon discovered that other scholars were scouring the Yankee archives looking for any material relating to Louisbourg. It was in late 1963 in the Massachusetts Historical Society in Boston — I remember that precise moment as though it were yesterday — that I learned that Louisbourg was to be reconstructed and that it was the intention of the Canadian government to ensure that the reconstruction project was firmly