

## Lifting the Mist: Recent Studies on the Scots and Irish

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Volume 18, Number 1, Autumn 1988

URI: [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad18\\_1re04](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad18_1re04)

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### Publisher(s)

The Department of History of the University of New Brunswick

### ISSN

0044-5851 (print)

1712-7432 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this document

Toner, P. (1988). Lifting the Mist: : recent Studies on the Scots and Irish. *Acadiensis*, 18(1), 215–226.

that all the recent studies of the Irish in Canada have been written by men, and that none of them has explored the experiences of women. This imbalance must be redressed.

Over a century has now elapsed since Nicholas Flood Davin's *The Irishman in Canada* became the only attempt at a general history of the subject.<sup>6</sup> By testing the hypotheses of Miller, adopting the new perspectives of Akenson, employing Elliott's methodology on a wider scale, and bringing women into the picture, historians will soon be in a position to write a much-needed modern comprehensive study of the Irish in Canada. Since they were the largest English-speaking ethnic group in the pre-Confederation period, such a study is long overdue.

DAVID A. WILSON

### Lifting the Mist: Recent Studies on the Scots and Irish

IN THE NOT SO DISTANT PAST, some historians have been in the habit of viewing the Scots and Irish immigration to this country in the light of folk memory and tradition. It was easy to accept the traditional views without much detailed investigation, and to interpret the social, cultural, and political adjustment of these "Celtic" peoples into our society with such traditions firmly in mind. Of primary importance was the view that these peoples were involuntary emigrants from the old country, torn from hearth and home by forces beyond their control, and cast ashore upon the forbidding coasts of North America. They were met by indifference at best, and bravely struggled against disadvantages not faced by other British immigrants. In the long run, the Scots and the Irish endured, and perhaps even prevailed, enriching our culture with a mystique which had eluded the American Loyalists who had preceded them, and which could never have been shared by the later "English" immigrants (who incidentally were in very short supply, if we are to believe the literature, and even when identified, must be qualified, as in the case of the "Yorkshiremen" of Cumberland, Nova Scotia). Ask a person of Scots extraction and you often will be told that his earliest ancestor to cross the Atlantic "was run out for stealing sheep". Ask a person of Irish extraction, and you will be told tales of "The Famine". Ask any amateur historian of the Scots or the Irish (and a good many professional historians as well) and you will be presented with stock-in-trade stories of the Highland Clearances and of oppression by landlords in both Ireland and Scotland. Probe more deeply, and you will be told that the English preferred sheep to men in the Highland glens, and that Scots culture prospered in Cape Breton, the Island,

6 Nicholas Flood Davin, *The Irishman in Canada* (London, 1877).

and in Glengarry; that the Irish immigrants suffered discrimination because they were Catholic, that they were forced to take poor land because the better was already occupied, and that many were thrust back upon the squalor of the urban slums, labouring for a pittance under conditions not far removed in quality from those of their predecessors at home.

The advertisement for a recent children's movie declared: "A single dream is stronger than a thousand realities!" If one were to ask any historian who has attempted to come to grips with the realities of Scots and Irish immigration to this country, they would certainly agree with this conclusion, so deeply engrained are these dreams of the immigrant past. Yet, in recent years, a few historians have attempted to isolate real truths about the Scots and the Irish, and to separate myth from fact; in other words, they have sought to explore the true nature of these important groups and their contribution to Canadian society. Making the attempt in itself is worthy of accolades.

The motivation of the historian who would deal with immigration or ethnicity can be rather varied. The most obvious is to discover the fortunes in the new land of a large or even a small group of immigrants from specific source areas, or to explore the immigrant experience of a variety of immigrants from many sources. This information would tell us something of the nature of our own society during the period in which this immigration took place, and in turn reveal much about Canada in general. Almost as obvious is the quest for clues about the source areas themselves. Immigrants to Canada or any other country have been hived off a parent society, and can provide evidence about that society by the way in which they adapted in their new environment. But the fortunes of the immigrant generation constitute a limited study if their children do not maintain a sense of ethnic identity. If the immigrants cannot be distinguished from other immigrant groups, and if they assimilate into the host society readily, there is little scope for the study of adaptive change in any depth. Hence, the ability of an immigrant group to transmit a distinctive identity, no matter how changed or muted, to successive generations makes the study of ethnic history the reward for comprehension of the immigrant generation. Immigrants who did not transmit this heritage are less worthy of concentrated study than those who did, simply because their rapid assimilation made less impact on the host society. All studies of immigrant groups should be framed with that caveat in mind.

J.M. Bumsted has made his mark in so many fields of specialisation within Canadian history that it is difficult to imagine recent Canadian historiography without his contributions. Although many would take issue with much that he has written, none can ignore his works, or pass them off lightly. When he speaks on a topic, he does not close the matter — rather, he opens a new dimension for discussion and interpretation. This is the case with his recent masterpiece on the Scots, *The People's Clearance* (Edinburgh and Winnipeg, Edinburgh University Press and the University of Manitoba Press, 1982). His diligent research is obvious from the opening pages, and does not diminish as he rolls through the

evidence in a systematic and powerful fashion. His conclusions are no less powerful, nor indeed, less disturbing to those who deserve to be disturbed. Although he accepts that there is an element of truth in the traditional view of the Highland Clearances and their impact on the Scots migrations to Canada, Bumsted advances the argument that the more important migration was that which preceded that "Grand Dérangement" of the Highland people. Although much smaller in scale, the emigrations out of the Highlands before Waterloo (and therefore before the worst of the Clearances began) were in large part deliberate, and undertaken by Scots who were fairly well-established in Highland society.

These earlier emigrants were drawn, not from the cottier class, but rather from the "tacksman" class, who possessed some capital and thus the means to emigrate under their own economic power. The tacksman was a vestige from the feudal Highland past — someone obsolete within Highland society especially after the failure of the Rising of 1745. In many ways, the Tacksman was the intermediary who provided the "glue" which held the glen together, and firmly under the sway of the chief. He was usually related quite closely to the chief, something which was not the case for the majority of the clansmen (contrary to tradition), and he served as the middleman, leasing large blocks of land, and then doling this land out to tenants, who in turn might sub-divide to lesser clansmen. In the old Highland society, the tacksman paid his feudal obligations in part by bringing out his tenants and their sub-tenants in arms at the call of the chief. Clearly, these people had a stake in the old society which was seriously weakened by the arrival of law and order on the point of an English bayonet. These were not stupid or uninformed people, and they could see clearly the handwriting on the wall. Once the Highlands became ever more exposed to the modern world, the lower their position in society would be. Many chose to emigrate while they still had the means, and this emigration was not popular in all quarters. The chiefs, who still had not completely divested themselves of their old attitudes, felt the tacksmen were necessary to maintain order in the glens, and therefore opposed wholesale emigration. For different reasons, the Government also was less than supportive. There was seen to be little enough stability in the Highlands, and to lose some of the best of Highland society was bound to weaken that society. Furthermore, these people were not impoverished; Bumsted calculates that they represented a loss in specie of ten pounds sterling each at a minimum, a serious subtraction in a coin-starved economy. Those migrants who arrived in the imperial residue which ultimately became Canada established the basic cores of Scots settlement which are seen as such to this day, like Glengarry and the coasts of the Lower Gulf. These Gaelic settlements would become magnets which attracted the later waves of more impoverished Highland cottiers during the three decades of the classic Clearance period after Waterloo, and their significance to Canadian history must be seen in that light. These early Highlanders had provided leadership for their social and

economic inferiors, and their emigration was judged by some to be desertion, but their early experience in the New World may also have facilitated the later immigration and adjustment of those inferiors when they were shovelled out of the glens. In its outline sketch, much of this has been known to historians, but Bumsted has provided a context, both Highland and Canadian, for this early Highland migration. Why so many of Scots descent prefer to believe that their ancestors were merely impoverished sheep thieves is a good question, since it is obvious that many of their ancestors had the good sense to leave while they still had the means to do so, and to take with them the means to perpetuate Gaelic culture in Canada long after it had disappeared from vast areas of the mainland Highlands of Scotland.

Bumsted promised to follow with further publications which would concentrate more specifically upon the New World settlements established by these early immigrants. The first of these, *Land, Settlement, and Politics on Eighteenth Century Prince Edward Island* (Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987), is a fitting sequel. Bumsted does not argue for a Scots monopoly on the early development of the Island, but does demonstrate the tremendous impact of the Scots in its early and formative years. No simple regurgitation of the simplistic shibboliths of past historiography, this work attempts to put the settlement years into a perspective untarnished by the political passions of the 19th century. The condemnation of the land structure on the Island is presented in a different light. There is no question that the structure of land ownership, with its high proportion of absentee landlords, was bound to cause problems, but Bumsted demonstrates that the problem was compounded several times over by the premature acquisition of a legislature and the trappings of larger, more populous provinces, which demanded increased revenues and in turn put pressure on the land structure. The political problems of the 19th century were created, not by the method of land ownership, but by these complications.

It was into this breach that the Highland immigrants were thrown by the hundreds, long before the Clearances began. There had been Acadian survivors from the turbulence of the Seven Years' War, and there would be some Loyalists and a few Irish, but the backbone of the early settlers on the Island were Scots, mainly Highlanders, and disproportionately Catholic. If any criticism can be levelled at Bumsted, it is the minor one that the Scots connection in the settlement of the Island and the Scots influence on the development of Island society should have been more clearly elaborated. The careful and thoughtful reader will catch the implications of Bumsted's evidence, but sometimes, especially when a rather different approach is taken, it is necessary to bash the reader on the head. Bumsted has this ability, and this time should have used a bigger stick.

Bumsted created ripples of discomfort, but D.H. Akenson's contributions resemble something more like a pounding surf. His first venture into the topic of

the Irish in Canada asked "... Whatever happened to the Irish?".<sup>1</sup> While he never did answer this question, he did stir the comfortable assumptions about the Irish in Canada so violently that they have yet to settle out again. He followed through with a strong and well-conceived work, *The Irish in Ontario: a study in rural history* (Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984), and then broadened his focus in *Being Had: historians, the evidence, and the Irish in North America* (Port Credit, Ont., P.D. Meany Publishers, 1985). His most recent work, *Small Differences: Irish Protestants and Irish Catholics, 1815-1922* (Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queens University Press, 1988) wrestles with the problem of social, occupational, and implied economic differences between the Irish of both religions.

Just who the Irish were, and what kind of immigrant settlers they made occupied his work for some years, and his answers to these questions are not in doubt. Since two-thirds of the Irish in Canada were found in Ontario, Akenson states that if one is to understand the Irish in Canada, one must begin with a study of the Irish in that province. Unstated, but quite clear to the reader, is the assumption that what is true of the Irish in Ontario must therefore be more or less true of the Irish in the rest of Canada. He also contends that writings about the Irish in the United States are dustbins of misconception, whose interpretations and hypotheses have been accepted by historians in Canada. Methodically, relentlessly, almost cold-bloodedly, Akenson attacks and demolishes what he considers to be the misconceptions about the Irish in the United States, in Ontario, and by extension, in Canada. The Irish in Canada, according to Akenson, provide a vital key to the comprehension of the Irish in the United States, mainly because the data recorded in the Canadian census manuscripts is much more explicit about details such as ethnicity and religion. Presumably, the Irish who came to Canada were much like those who went to the United States, and therefore quite unlike the image held by professional "Irish-Americans" today. The Irish were a rural people, not urban. The Irish were farmers, not unskilled labourers, and good farmers at that. The Irish adjusted to life in Ontario rather easily, not with the stereotypical difficulty. The Irish were no worse off than any other immigrants, perhaps even better off than most. And whatever differences might be detected between Irish Protestants and Irish Catholics were few, insignificant, and readily explained by factors other than religion or culture.

There are many laudible features in *The Irish in Ontario*. There is always an advance in scholarship when beliefs and myths are questioned, disturbed, sifted, and re-examined. But the basic problem with this study is that Ontario is not Canada, and the Irish who went there were not necessarily representative of the Irish in Canada as a whole, much the less of the Irish throughout North

1 "Ontario: Whatever Happened to the Irish?", *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, III (1982), pp.204-56.

America. Akenson's investigation of the Irish in a small portion of Eastern Ontario proves little about the Irish of that province, let alone about the Irish across the country. It is perfectly true that, as he states, no area is average or truly representative of a larger population. A random sample of the whole Irish population of Ontario might have been better, but even a 15 per cent sample would have required a database of between fifty and sixty thousand. A dissection of several areas scattered throughout the province might also have been better, although any such selection would have been subject to criticism. Yet, no matter how well-conducted, his examination of Leeds cannot be expanded, with or without the assistance of Darroch and Ornstein,<sup>2</sup> to offer a really convincing thumbnail sketch of the Irish in Ontario, and in turn, this cannot be used to explain the Irish in Quebec or the Maritimes. Unfortunately, Akenson had almost nothing to draw upon that could be used to parallel his analysis. John Mannion's work on three settlements cannot be considered compatible, because it is a study of cultural geography, not of occupational status,<sup>3</sup> and while Terry Punch's study can be used to a certain extent, it in turn falls prey to the "respectability" myth — the Irish were just as good as the others — and contains little detailed analysis.<sup>4</sup>

Since it is difficult to compare Akenson's work with that of others, this writer

- 2 A. Gordon Darroch and Michael D. Ornstein have published two important studies which would seem to confirm Akenson's belief that Catholic and Protestant Irish were little different from one another. In "Ethnicity and Occupational Structure in Canada in 1871: the Vertical Mosaic in Historical Perspective", *Canadian Historical Review*, LXI, 3 (September 1980), pp.305-33, they used a heads-of-household sample drawn from the 1871 census to establish (among other things) that there were more Protestant Irish than Catholic Irish, and that the occupational structure of the Catholic Irish was not that much different from that of the Protestant Irish. In "Ethnicity and Class, Transitions over a Decade: Ontario 1861-1871", *Historical Papers* (1984), pp.11-37 they compare 10,000 individuals drawn from the Ontario Census of 1861 and the Canadian Census of 1871, and conclude (among other things) that if Irish Catholics had been somewhat worse off than Irish Protestants in 1861, they had managed to close the gap considerably by 1871. The present writer has reservations, as well as considerable respect, about their work. The reservation which is critical here is the nature of the sample used. By restricting the sample to heads-of-household, the occupations of the subordinate members of the household are ignored, and the result has an ethnic bias. For example, in 1861, only 60.9 per cent of the Irish Catholic labour force in New Brunswick were heads-of-household, as opposed to 70.6 per cent for Irish Protestants. Among Irish Catholic heads, farmers accounted for 58.6 per cent of the occupations and all forms of unskilled or semi-skilled labour 26.5 per cent. Among Irish Protestants, the respective percentages were 66.8 and 16.1. When the subordinate members of households are included in the tabulations, the Irish Catholics were 37.5 per cent farmers and 48.3 per cent labourers and the Irish Protestants were 49.4 per cent and 33.7 per cent respectively. Because a heads-of-household sample can be so misleading, the present writer abandoned this type of sample years ago.
- 3 John J. Mannion, *Irish Settlements in Eastern Canada: a study in cultural transfer* (Toronto, 1974).
- 4 Terrence M. Punch, *Irish Halifax: The Immigrant Generation, 1815-1859* (Halifax, n.d.).

is forced to fall back upon his own work on the Irish in New Brunswick, which involved a computer study of the Irish as recorded in the manuscripts of the censuses of 1851 and 1861.<sup>5</sup> Although there were fewer Irish in New Brunswick, they did manage to edge out those of Ontario as a proportion of the total population in the 1871 census. The Irish of New Brunswick, using Akenson's formula, were more evenly divided in religion than were those of Ontario, with perhaps an edge towards the Catholics in 1851, but more towards the Protestants in 1871. This fact also makes them different from the Irish in the remainder of Eastern Canada, who were decidedly more Catholic. Indeed, perhaps because they were intermediate between those of Ontario and those of the provinces further east, the Irish of New Brunswick can provide a good touchstone for those of the whole nation. In addition, Saint John provides a better urban sample than does Gananoque, Ont.

Of course, most of the Irish in New Brunswick were rural, but not to the same degree as the remainder of the population nor to the same degree as the Irish in Ontario. Saint John was not merely one of the largest cities in British North America; but it was also the city with the highest proportion of Irish, and more specifically, it had probably the highest proportion of Catholic Irish. And in many ways, the Catholic Irish of Saint John (40 per cent of whom were from Cork) closely resembled the stereotypical Irish immigrant community. While they were not concentrated into one vast ghetto, they did dominate a scattering of neighbourhoods, from York Point on the northern side to the Lower Cove in the South End. These neighbourhoods in turn were dominated by immigrants from specific counties in Ireland. York Point was the Cork stronghold, while immigrants from Carlingford clustered in the Lower Cove, and the immigrants from Ulster were more in evidence in the area around the site of the present cathedral. While many of these Irish immigrants were Famine arrivals, the majority had arrived in a more or less steady stream since the time of Waterloo, and if that early arrival should have allowed them to integrate themselves into the local society and economy, it was not successful. The majority of the Catholic Irish immigrants in Saint John were unskilled labourers, including 70 per cent of those who had arrived during the Famine. There were Irish merchants, artisans, and shopkeepers, but these were few and far between compared with the Scots and English. If we look more carefully at these Irish in the better occupations, we find that they were disproportionately Ulster in their origins. The majority of the working class Catholic Irish immigrants originated in the Irish language areas of the south and west of Ireland, and this tendency was more pronounced among the later immigrants.

Over a quarter of the Catholic Irish in the province were concentrated in Saint

5 The reader may wish to consult "The Irish of New Brunswick at Mid-Century: the 1851 Census", in P.M. Toner, ed., *New Ireland Remembered: historical essays on the Irish in New Brunswick* (Fredericton, 1988), pp.106-32.



John, compared to less than 20 per cent of the Protestant Irish, and about 5 per cent of the non-Irish population. The remainder of the Irish were scattered in various concentrations throughout the towns, the villages and the countryside. Some of the counties were far more Irish than Loyalist and, except in the Acadian areas, the Irish often were the principal ethnic group. Many of these rural and semi-rural Catholic Irish were farmers, but surprisingly large numbers were labourers, presumably in the woods and in the mills. In many areas, Catholic and Protestant Irish were found in roughly equal numbers, and when their occupations are compared, there can be no question about who was better off. The rural Protestant Irish, especially those born in Ireland, were overwhelmingly farmers, and very seldom fell into the category of unskilled labour. A combination of the parishes which contained small towns and villages (as opposed to the completely rural parishes) produces a higher proportion of Catholics, and a parallel higher proportion of unskilled labour. There is no simple way to remove the occupational differences between Catholic and Protestant Irish: these differences existed, and can be measured in terms of the census data.

This can be elaborated in terms of one occupational category — farmer. Of course “farmer” conveys a general meaning only, and as handy as it might be to distinguish its bearer from a “ship carpenter” or “shoemaker” or “millworker”, it does not tell us much about the relative affluence of the individual farmer. There were successful farmers and failures, just as there were “labourers” who were probably more secure than some of the farmers, especially the tenants (yes, there were Irish tenant farmers in the New Brunswick of 1851 and 1861, and in greater numbers than the nominal census indicates). Unfortunately, there are no assessment records from the 1840s or 1850s by which the actual economic circumstances of the Irish immigrants could be judged. The one possibility for comparison is the agricultural schedules of the 1861 census, which specifies crops, livestock, and values for each individual farmer. By matching this data with the data in the nominal schedules, it is possible to decide if the Protestant Irish and the Catholic Irish made equally good farmers. Preliminary results based on the data for more than 4,500 farmers of all backgrounds (Akenson used a sample of 317) in all parts of the province demonstrate that they were not. Irish farmers in general were not as prosperous as were the Loyalists, the English, or the Scots. Their farm values were lower, in total and on a per acre basis, and their proportion of improved and cultivated land was lower. They had fewer horses, cattle, and sheep, and only held their own in hogs. When immigrants from Ireland are compared with those from England and Scotland with similar dates of arrival, they fare no better. But of course the big question is that related to religion. Akenson’s contention that the alleged earlier arrival of the Protestants would account for any superficial superiority in farming over the Catholics simply cannot be supported with the data from the New Brunswick census of 1861. Irish Protestant farmers were better off than Irish Catholic farmers who

arrived during any ten year period from Waterloo to the Famine.

None of the data in the New Brunswick censuses of 1851 and 1861 can be used to provide much support for Akenson's thesis that the Irish, Catholic as well as Protestant, were merely ordinary immigrants, quite similar to immigrants from Scotland and England. Occupational comparisons may at first show little difference — until the Irish are separated by religion. When this is done, the Catholic Irish fall below the Scots and English in proportion of farmers, and the Protestants fall above. Similarly, the Catholic Irish were more likely to have been unskilled labourers than the Scots or English, while the Protestant Irish were less likely. As with the case of the farmers, grouping of immigrants by date of arrival (conveniently provided by the 1851 census) demonstrates the same pattern for immigrants in all arrival cohorts. Granted, the differences between Catholic and Protestant Irish who had been in New Brunswick for 30 years or so were less extreme, but they were still there. Although a generation may have narrowed the gap, even this lapse of time did not close it. Naturally, the Famine Irish of both religions were not so well off, but the Protestants who arrived during that period managed to get themselves onto farms, and more prosperous farms at that, at more than double the rate of the Catholics. That is scarcely a small difference.

Akenson's assumption that the Irish arrived with an advantage in language not shared by the Germans or Dutch must also be treated with some care. Naturally, the Protestants may be assumed to have spoken English, but over half of the Irish Catholics who can be identified according to point of origin in Ireland came from areas which were still Irish in language at the time they would have left. Now it is probably true that many of the those would have had some familiarity with English, and that those who chose to emigrate would have had more familiarity than those left behind. But the odds are incredibly high that many would have left Ireland with less than adequate skills in English. Akenson's argument that only the unilingual Irish speakers should be considered might make some sense, but it would be difficult to use a similar argument in New Brunswick today. Very few of the province's Acadians are ignorant of English. Any politician who might attempt to dismantle French-language services on that basis would be in extreme difficulties. And given the political climate, no academic would argue that the differences between French- and English-speaking New Brunswickers count for little simply because the vast majority of Acadians also speak English. There is no reason to argue that the bilingual Irish immigrants of 1851 should be accorded lesser treatment.

About 20 per cent of the immigrants came from Cork, which linguistically was about half Irish in 1851, but far more so before the Famine. When only Catholics are considered, the proportion of Corkmen rises to over 30 per cent. Rural Cork was mainly Irish in language at the time of Waterloo, when Cork immigrants began to appear in New Brunswick in any sort of numbers. And of the Corkmen living in New Brunswick, the majority of those who can be identified at the

parish level were from West Cork, which was still largely Irish-speaking in 1851. The manner in which the Cork immigrants (as well as those from other Irish-speaking areas) clustered in certain localities (in contrast to those from English-speaking areas of Ireland) would suggest that their command of English was limited to the point that they sought security in the company of their own people.<sup>6</sup> This point is best illustrated in Saint John. To eliminate any possible complications, the location of Famine Catholics according to language background in Ireland was plotted, and the results indicate some sorting by language. The higher the proportion of Irish spoken in the source county in Ireland, the greater the tendency for the immigrant to remain in Saint John (which was the main port of entry), while the immigrants from the English-speaking areas in Ireland disproportionately tended to move out into the small towns and villages of rural New Brunswick. Of those who remained in Saint John who can be plotted within the city, those from Irish language areas tended to cluster in the slum areas. The contrast between the Ulster Catholics and the Cork Catholics in terms of occupation is also an obvious one.

So too is the contrast between Catholic and Protestant and, of course, Protestants from the south of Ireland bear no resemblance to southern Catholics. If occupation can be used to indicate successful adaptation to life in New Brunswick, then Protestants were more successful than Catholics. Catholics from English-speaking areas, particularly Ulster, were more successful than those from the Irish-speaking areas. This evidence flies in the face of the statements made by Akenson, which assert that the success or failure of Irish immigrants in Ontario did not depend upon cultural factors, such as religion. He did not give serious consideration to language, but implicit in his argument is the assumption that Irish immigrants had a more or less equal opportunity once they arrived here, and that their performance here was such that differences based upon cultural or religious distinctions cannot be translated into economic or social terms.

Akenson's bottom line can serve to deny any Irish claim to "ethnic" status within Canadian society. Irish immigrants are one thing, simply because birthplace and the fact of a trans-Atlantic migration are real events which permanently affect the individual. But if these immigrants do not establish a distinct pattern of life in the New World, or cannot be differentiated from other immigrants, then there is no possibility of transmitting any such unique pattern to successive generations, and that is what qualifies a defined segment of society as "ethnic". Akenson's Irish were not distinct from other immigrants, and if he feels that they are more complex and more interesting as a result, then they are certainly so only as individuals, not as a group. In fact, as a group, they are (to one of Irish extraction) terrifyingly boring.

6 Again, the reader may wish to consult my article "The Origins of the New Brunswick Irish, 1851", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, XXIII, 1 & 2 (Spring and Summer 1988), pp. 104-19.

Not so in New Brunswick at least. New Brunswick was (and remains) a hodge-podge of different "charter" ethnic groups, and its society is interesting because of the way in which ethnicity and religion have combined to create a swirl of ever-shifting allegiances within the political spectrum. The Protestant Irish have virtually disappeared as a group after generations of intermarriage with Scots, English, and Loyalists. Similarly, a significant minority of early German and Dutch immigrants have also disappeared into the larger "British" identity. Some Scots have maintained a degree of ethnic consciousness, but of all the ordinarily English-speaking people of New Brunswick, the Catholic Irish have best preserved a sense of being "different". This is all the more remarkable because it is not related to any on-going obviously ethnic trappings, such as pipe bands, quaint ethnic food, or a separate and incomprehensible language. The Catholic Church, during that period in which it was controlled by Irish priests and bishops, provided some of the mortar necessary for such continuity, but feelings of Irish ethnicity have survived some equally anti-Irish periods in the history of the Catholic Church in this province. Just how can this persistence be explained if the Catholic Irish were, as Akenson would contend, no different from their neighbours? They were indeed different, and the evidence found in the early censuses confirms this fact.

If it were not for one very significant result, Donald Akenson could be reckoned the executioner of the goose which laid the golden egg. To argue so strongly that the Irish were not different from the other immigrants is to say that they are not worthy of separate study because of their Irishness. Hence further study of the Irish would be limited to the immigrant generation and that generation alone. Naturally, if this were the case, then many people who attempt to study the Irish as an ethnic group would be out of a job. There has been some grumbling about Akenson's work, but it is always mixed with praise for its high standards. Akenson followed such strict scholarly procedures that any objection must be equally dedicated to the isolation of factual, not mythical, reasons for such studies to be undertaken. Akenson, like Bumsted, has not cleared up the matter of the Irish immigrant in Canadian society; rather he has exploded a series of trite beliefs shared by Irish and non-Irish alike, and in doing so has created a debate among students of the Irish which must have beneficial long range results. I have been engaged in a study of the Irish in New Brunswick for some years. It has been difficult and time-consuming work. If anyone should be disturbed by the quite different conclusions reached by Akenson about the nature of the Irish immigrants in North America, I should be considered a pretty good candidate. This is not the case. If the Irish in eastern Ontario were indeed typical of those in Ontario, in Canada, and in North America, then the Irish in New Brunswick were not typical, therefore unique, and worthy of study for that reason alone. If, on the other hand, the Irish in eastern Ontario were not typical, then the Irish in New Brunswick offer an alternative to be explored in the study of the Irish elsewhere. Either way, my work has not been in vain, and in fact

assumes a greater degree of importance. For that I have Donald Akenson to thank.

PETER TONER

### Anthropological Uses of History and Culture

IN 1883 WILLIAM MORRIS WROTE THAT "The most grinding poverty is a trifling evil compared with the inequality of classes".<sup>1</sup> Many of the unfortunate people described in the books under review had both poverty and class inequality. Living on the verge of chaos and starvation, they were forced to filter ingenious means of "making a living" through the prism of culture. In the books being considered here we see how anthropologists and sociologists have sought in history the answers to powerlessness, inequality and underdevelopment in the Atlantic provinces.

Anthropologists have frequently investigated inequality from a cultural perspective. Anthropology's bias toward those who "fall behind" for one reason or another has resulted from the method of examining patterns of social behaviour in those contemporary societies thought to approximate that of our precursors. Since humankind's earliest societies left no written record, social and cultural anthropology focused on the study of culture from below and the "history" of the underdog. Anthropologists walked and talked with the natives, interpreting their culture to the rest of the world. Anthropologists understood culture as a product of accumulated knowledge and understandings about the world, a kind of encapsulated history. Culture then, as a condensed version of belief, was thought to be conservative since it validated traditional modes of thought and action. However, such an analysis has its limitations since the "modern" society goes unstudied and perhaps more fundamentally because studying a native society today may not reveal much about the past, when there was no modern society to influence it.

Re-evaluations of anthropological practice have stemmed from historians' insights into culture,<sup>2</sup> but also from anthropologists' own recognition of interpretive problems.<sup>3</sup> In the process the boundary between historical and cultural analysis has been blurred, although only sporadic and occasionally naive attempts have been made to combine the two.<sup>4</sup> The failure to combine

1 Cited in Robert Stewart, ed., *A Dictionary of Political Quotations* (London, 1984), p. 117.

2 See Raymond Williams, *Culture* (Glasgow, 1981) and *Keywords* (New York, 1976).

3 See Ladislav Holy and Milan Stuchlik, *Actions, Norms and Representations: Foundations of anthropological inquiry* (London, 1983).

4 Max Gluckman suggested some time ago that social anthropologists were justified in making