

The Canso Causeway: Tartan Tourism, Industrial Development, and the Promise of Progress for Cape Breton

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Volume 37, Number 2, Autumn 2008

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad37_2art03

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Department of History at the University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0044-5851 (print)

1712-7432 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Article abstract

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Cite this article

Beaton, M. & Muiise, D. (2008). The Canso Causeway:: Tartan Tourism, Industrial Development, and the Promise of Progress for Cape Breton. *Acadiensis*, 37(2), 39–69.

The Canso Causeway: Tartan Tourism, Industrial Development, and the Promise of Progress for Cape Breton

MEAGHAN BEATON and DEL MUISE

Cet article évalue la conceptualisation, la construction et la mythologisation de la chaussée de Canso, un important projet de reconstruction réalisé après la Seconde Guerre mondiale, qui a permis de relier la partie continentale de la Nouvelle-Écosse et le Cap-Breton en 1955. Réclamée pour aider à améliorer les perspectives décroissantes des industries du charbon et de l'acier du Cap-Breton, la chaussée a aussi eu un impact immense en élevant le tourisme au rang d'une industrie viable, le Cap-Breton étant une communauté écossaise traditionnelle et désormais accessible. Le tourisme et l'expansion industrielle ont été étroitement liés à un important changement de cap des politiques du gouvernement fédéral, qui a alors commencé à assumer un rôle plus interventionniste dans la planification du développement économique régional, ce qui leur a été profitable.

This article assesses the conceptualization, construction, and mythologizing of the Canso Causeway, a major post-Second World War reconstruction project that joined mainland Nova Scotia to Cape Breton Island in 1955. Sought after in order to help improve the waning prospects of Cape Breton's coal and steel industries, the causeway also had a tremendous impact on increasing tourism as a viable industry based on Cape Breton as a traditional but accessible Scottish community. Both tourism and industrial expansion were closely tied to and benefited from a significant policy shift as the federal government began to assume a more interventionist role in regional economic development planning.

Some historians tell you that Canada was united in 1867; those in Newfoundland set the date at 1949. But any enlightened Cape Bretoner will let you know that Canada will not be united until the Canso Causeway is completed.¹

THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE CANSO CAUSEWAY on 13 August 1955 was a significant public celebration for Nova Scotians. As a major post-Second World War reconstruction project spanning the Strait of Canso, the causeway finally provided a

1 Dennis Pelrine, "Canso Gets Its Causeway," *Oval* 22, no. 6 (December 1953): 8. The authors would like to thank the three anonymous reviewers for *Acadiensis* and editors Bill Parenteau and Steve Dutcher for their invaluable comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this article.

permanent link connecting mainland Nova Scotia to Cape Breton Island. After decades of public discussion, numerous engineering surveys, and boards of enquiry, construction of the causeway finally began in 1952 following intense lobbying by concerned Nova Scotia citizens and, in particular, the highly influential Liberal premier and iconic Cape Bretoner Angus L. Macdonald. The causeway, however, was not just a practical transportation solution to a very real transportation problem or a means to revitalize the waning prospects of Cape Breton's coal and steel industries. Within a decade of its completion, in fact, both the coal and steel industries would be nationalized in anticipation of their eventual cessation on the island (though the final closure of these industries took close to 50 years to complete).² The Canso Causeway – and particularly the new harbour south of the causeway – led to the development of other industries in the area in subsequent decades (mostly concentrated on the Cape Breton side). These decades also saw approaches toward regional economic planning change dramatically as both the provincial and federal governments entered a cycle of state planning designed to manage regional economies in ways never before attempted.³

Bridging the Strait of Canso did something else – it helped to redefine Cape Breton as a premiere tourist destination. As tourism came to dominate the island's economy, the ambitious projections for industrial growth embraced in 1955 were appropriately modified to place greater emphasis on the burgeoning tourism industry. At the causeway's opening ceremonies a campaign was symbolically launched to reposition the island as a traditional, but now more easily accessible, Scottish haven. The opening ceremonies were a critical flashpoint for the antimodern tropes embodied in the "tartanization" movement, which opposed the aspirations of some for modernity and all of its promises for industrial expansion and prosperity. Though he never lived in Cape Breton following his meteoric rise through the Halifax legal community and then the Nova Scotia Liberal Party after the First World War, "Angus L." – Macdonald's common moniker after he became premier – remained deeply tied to his Cape Breton roots. He seemed to develop a great sense of nostalgia for the island, a sentiment matched only by his similar regard for old Scotland. Before formally entering politics in 1930 as the surprising, and perhaps surprised, leader of the Liberal Party, Macdonald converted his longing for the island into a fervid Scottish trope, which he used shamelessly throughout his public career in order to wrap himself in a Celtic mystique. He also often expressed a wish to use his political success to improve conditions in his native Cape Breton. Advocating a permanent link connecting mainland Nova Scotia to Cape Breton was a logical objective, expressed very early after his first electoral victory in 1933.

Although he died suddenly and unexpectedly a year before the causeway opened in 1955, Angus L.'s association with its suitably Celtic-themed inauguration was palpable to everyone at the ceremony; even the Toronto-based *Globe and Mail* opined

2 James Bickerton, *Nova Scotia, Ottawa and the Politics of Regional Development* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

3 For an overview of regional economic policy see E.R. Forbes and Del Muike, eds., *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press and Fredericton, NB: Acadiensis Press, 1991), notably chs. 10-13; see as well Donald J. Savoie, *Regional Economic Development: Canada's Search for Solutions*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992). For a more politically pointed assessment, see Savoie's *Visiting Grandchildren: Economic Development in the Maritimes* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

that Macdonald's "spirit pervaded the entire show."⁴ "The Road to the Isles," or at least the title of that First World War Scottish ballad, seemed to be on everyone's lips at the official opening of the Canso Causeway on 13 August 1955. The words of its refrain framed the official dais, and its title remains forever associated with the causeway. The song captured and permeated the symbolic space where Cape Breton's fast fading, if still hopeful, industrial community was being transformed into a world-class destination for travelers looking to experience the island's rich Celtic past within a magnificent landscape of sea and mountain terrain that was punctuated with a number of cultural heritage attractions. Cape Breton's identification with Celtic traditions had been, to some extent, Angus L.'s brainchild. Prior to his premature death in 1954, Macdonald was said to have mused that an appropriate celebration of the causeway's completion would be a hundred pipers marching across playing "The Road to the Isles." His wish was granted that celebratory August day in 1955.

The Canso Causeway's history is crucial to understanding the significant changes that took place both nationally and regionally during the immediate post-Second World War period. As one of the largest mega-projects ever undertaken in Atlantic Canada, it symbolized a fundamental change in philosophy of the Canadian state, one that would see the government undertake a much-expanded role in economic development throughout the country. During this post-war period the federal government adopted an interventionist state policy characterized by massive expenditures on infrastructure projects. This state policy was undertaken in an attempt to avoid the economic instability and chaos that erupted after the First World War. Construction of the Canso Causeway fit perfectly within the federal state's expanded and interventionist approach to recovery.

"... a bridge across the Strait is what is wanted":

The Campaign for a Permanent Link

The causeway was not built without a long process of negotiation and resolute advocacy. Lobbying for a permanent link across the Strait of Canso had been underway for nearly 50 years before the project finally came to fruition in the years following the Second World War. It was one of two important post-war projects that sprang up in Nova Scotia during the 1950s — projects that came to define post-Second World War rehabilitation initiatives in the province. The causeway, along with the bridge connecting the cities of Dartmouth and Halifax (completed in the spring of 1955), embodied the federal government's policy of state intervention in the economy through undertaking the construction of massive infrastructure projects, as typified elsewhere by the Saint Lawrence Seaway and the Trans-Canada Pipeline. The causeway replaced an inefficient ferry system that had been in place for over 75 years and its construction was connected to development of a link with Newfoundland, which fulfilled the requirements under the 1949 Terms of Union that had promised fast and efficient transportation between Canada's newest province and the rest of the country. As part of the new Trans-Canada Highway, the causeway was tied to the national vision of physically uniting Canada.

In season, the strait had been one of the busiest shipping and fishing lanes in Atlantic

4 *Globe and Mail*, 15 August 1955.

Canada, linking the open Atlantic with the Gulf of Saint Lawrence and thereby shortening the trip from Halifax to Montreal considerably.⁵ Prior to the construction of the causeway, trains arriving at the edge of the strait had to be broken up for ferrying across the strait before they could proceed to the industrial heart of Cape Breton surrounding Sydney Harbour in the 1880s. This system, however, spurred the development of small service centers at Mulgrave and Point Tupper on opposite sides of the strait. The end of the 19th century also saw the construction of a coal-shipping pier for the Inverness Railway Company at nearby Port Hastings, drawing upon coal from the Inverness-based mines of the company. Heavier rail demand prompted a growing need for services to both sides of the Strait of Canso to ensure that passengers and freight could be moved efficiently, a complicated and time-consuming process that employed hundreds of men from the strait area. The subsequent amalgamation of the Intercolonial Railway by the Canadian National system following the great consolidations of the war period only served to help solidify centralized control over the transportation system of the region, including all the responsibility for the ferry service crossing the strait. This centralized control was a source of continuing controversy whenever conditions interfered with service or as the amount of automobile traffic increased demand beyond the capacity of the always-inadequate service. Adhering to schedules set down by Canadian National proved unmanageable, and the inability of the railway's local centres at Mulgrave and Point Tupper to alter service and schedules as conditions warranted led to increased frustration at the strait.

Although concrete political action leading directly to the construction of a more permanent link did not actively surface until 1943, the first public campaign for a crossing dates from 1901 when J.A. Gillies, a former Member of Parliament for Richmond, declared that an engineering survey was underway to explore bridging the strait. The survey proposed a bridge to replace two existing ferries, the *S.S. Mulgrave*, which had been providing train and vehicular service for the previous 25 years, and the *Scotia I*, added in 1901 to improve train service.⁶ Hiram Donkin, a former general

5 Pierre Camu, "The Strait of Canso in Relation to the Economy of Cape Breton Island," *Geographical Bulletin*, no. 3 (Ottawa, 1953), 50-69. This article, sponsored by the Geographical Branch of the Department of Mines and Technical Surveys in Ottawa and which provides a summary of the place of the strait and its impact on the Cape Breton economy on the eve of construction, argued strenuously in favour of a fixed link. The quote "a bridge across the Strait is what is wanted" is from C.W. Vernon, *Cape Breton, Canada, at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century: a treatise of natural resources and development* (Toronto: National Publishing, 1903), 330.

6 Laurence J. Doucet, *The Road to the Isle: The Canso Causeway – Deepest in the World*, 2nd ed. (Fredericton, NB: n.p., 1955). While Doucet's pamphlet examined the roles of local organizations such as the Canso Crossing Association and the Maritime Board of Trade in the campaign following the war, it was neither scholarly nor comprehensive and certainly not unbiased. Subsequent treatments of the construction of the causeway have been cursory, though the silver and golden anniversaries in 1980 and 2005 produced a great outpouring of commemorative activity. A largely celebratory and commemorative book containing many reminiscences of the opening in 1955 was published in 2005, for instance, and it repeated a great deal of Doucet's work regarding development of the causeway. See Elaine Ingalls Hogg, *When Cape Breton Joined Canada: Celebrating Fifty Years of the Canso Causeway* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 2005). Another treatment of the early years is found in Mike R. Hunter and Carol Corbin, "'Built for Going Away': The Canso Causeway An Epic in Three Acts," in Godfrey Baldacchino, ed., *Bridging Islands: The Impact of Fixed Links* (Charlottetown: Nimbus Publishing, 2007), 67-83.

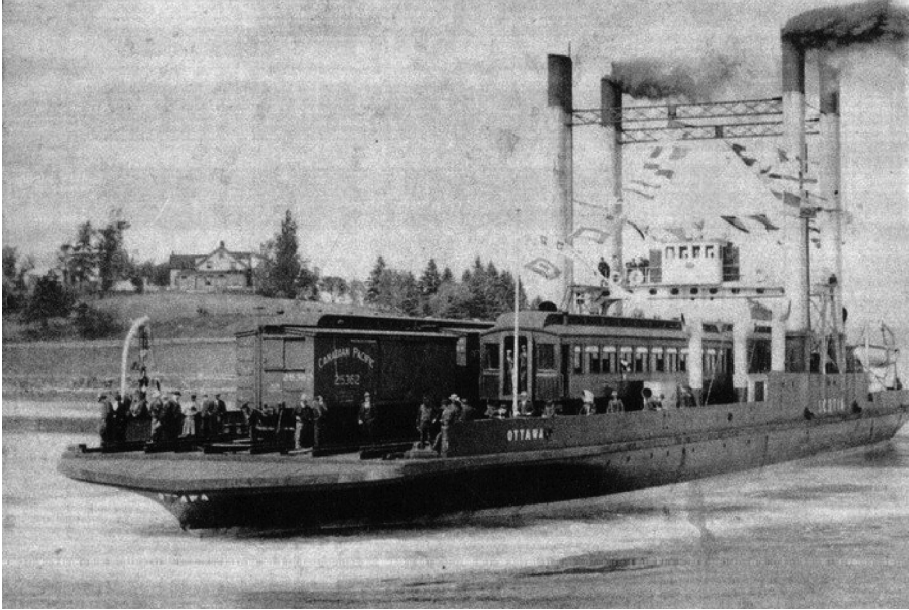


Figure 1: Railway ferries, such as the *Scotia II*, in service from 1915 until after the Second World War, carried both passenger and freight cars. Service could be inconsistent and inefficient, with a lengthy turn-around times for loading and unloading, especially when ice clogged the Strait of Canso during the winter and early spring. Automobile ferries, operated by the provincial department of highways, would appear later, although wait times were frequently longer than expected, especially in bad weather. See *The Canso Crossing's History and Impact*: Gut of Canso Museum and Archives, http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/pm.php?id=record_detail&fl=0&lg=English&ex=00000222 (accessed 8 April 08).

manager of the Dominion Coal Company, had engineering plans completed that same year that called for a massive two-span bridge to cross the strait at its narrowest point.⁷ Encouraged by these early declarations, four Nova Scotia businessmen incorporated the Canso Bridge Company on 15 May 1902. The company was endorsed by various Cape Breton business and community organizations, such as the North Sydney Board of Trade as well as a number of local newspapers.⁸ However, despite these early efforts, little concrete action to improve service across the strait was achieved. In 1915 the *Scotia II* replaced the *S.S. Mulgrave* to help with increased traffic, but no further plans for a permanent link would be advanced for another generation. The collapse of the

7 A plan of the proposed bridge is found in Vernon, *Cape Breton, Canada*, 330. The proposed bridge span departed from the foot of Cape Porcupine near Aulds Cove on the mainland and landed at Balanche Point near Port Hastings, the exact route the causeway would take half a century later.

8 The four businessmen were Alex Cross of Sydney, Robert G. Reid of Montreal, Graham Fraser of New Glasgow, and Hiram Donkin of Antigonish and Halifax. All four had direct connections to the coal and steel industry of Cape Breton County; see *Sydney Post* (Sydney), 15 March 1902.

regional economy in the 1920s inhibited discussion of a permanent link for another decade following the First World War, and the country's desperate attempts to come to terms with the Great Depression of the 1930s made serious consideration of such a project next to impossible. Furthermore, as the coal and steel industries entered into a period of intense turmoil, discussion of such grandiose initiatives was temporarily shelved. The Maritime Transport Commission, a sub-committee of the Maritime Board of Trade, which had been so prominent in the Maritime Rights Movement of the 1920s, gave occasional support to the idea of a Strait of Canso crossing but their advocacy, like earlier declarations of support, produced no tangible results.

In 1934 the Royal Commission on Provincial Economic Inquiry was appointed by Nova Scotia's newly elected Liberal government of Angus L. Macdonald, and its mandate was to examine the "adequacy of Dominion-Provincial financial arrangements and any other matter affecting the economic welfare of Nova Scotia." The commission concluded, not surprisingly, that Nova Scotia would need federal assistance to help offset negative effects of national policies – not to mention the financial shortfalls of the depression era. Although there was no specific mention of a permanent link across the strait, the commission called for improvement to provincial road networks and intensified tourism promotion in an effort to develop alternative economic strategies for the province.⁹ In 1937 yet another commission was appointed, this time by the federal government, to examine dominion-provincial relations. Nova Scotia seized this opportunity to call upon Ottawa to become involved in bridging the strait as a federal-provincial undertaking, the purpose of which would be to help integrate Cape Breton's coal and steel industries into both regional and national economies – not to mention provide an economic boost to one of the poorest regions of the province. A permanent link across the Strait of Canso was also touted as a means to open Cape Breton up to more intense tourism activity.¹⁰ While much of the report and recommendations of that commission were set aside when war broke out in 1939, the idea of the fixed link as a joint responsibility of the federal and provincial governments was eagerly seized upon by the Nova Scotian government and would remain one of its prime objectives in the following years.

During and immediately following the Second World War, the federal government initiated a series of economic planning efforts. The war had prompted a more centrally coordinated effort through the creation in 1945 of the Department of Reconstruction and Supply. Under the direction of C.D. Howe its main objective, in collaboration with provincial governments, was to manage reconstruction efforts throughout the country to ensure there would be no repeat of the economic turmoil that had followed the end of the

9 Nova Scotia, *Royal Commission on Provincial Economic Inquiry* (Halifax: King's Printer, 1934), 4, 93-7. See also Kenneth Gary Jones, "Response to Regional Disparity in the Maritime Provinces, 1926-1942: A Study in Canadian Intergovernmental Relations" (master's thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1980) and, in terms of Macdonald's ascent to the Liberal leadership and early years in power, see T. Stephen Henderson, *Angus L Macdonald: A Provincial Liberal* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), ch. 2.

10 T. Stephen Henderson, "A New Federal Vision: Nova Scotia and the Rowell-Sirois Report, 1938-1948," in Dimitry Anastakis and Penny Bryden, eds., *Framing Canadian Federalism for the Twenty-First Century: Essays in Honour of John T. Saywell* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, forthcoming).

Great War 25 years earlier. Unfortunately for the Maritime Provinces, wartime economic policies had somewhat limited the region's capacity for economic growth and prosperity. Under Howe's earlier leadership of the Department of Munitions and Supply, there had been systematic industrial promotion for central Canadian industries while similar opportunities were denied to other regional industrial producers – particularly Maritime steel producers. This pattern had persisted despite the presence of four federal ministers from the Maritimes in Mackenzie King's wartime cabinet, including Minister of Defense for Naval Affairs Angus L. Macdonald (who began serving in that position in 1940).¹¹

In order to prime the planning pump, a Special Committee of the House of Commons was convened in May 1943 to study, among other initiatives, possibilities for a permanent link between Cape Breton and mainland Nova Scotia. Agitation to overcome the transportation problem became more intense as the war dragged towards its end, as participation of the Cape Breton coal and steel industry in the national war effort was perceived to be compromised by the absence of such a link. In light of this, the committee sought to address the "question of further development of the coal industry of Nova Scotia, and in particular with transportation, especially having regard to . . . the bottleneck of transportation at the Canso Strait." Just two witnesses were heard: D.W. McLachlan from the federal Department of Transport and Canadian National Railways' (CNR's) Chief of Research and Development S.W. Fairweather. McLachlan concentrated on what sort of permanent link would be most appropriate: a bridge, a causeway, or a tunnel. He testified that the cost of either a tunnel or bridge, estimated at \$8,000,000 and \$22,000,000 respectively, might prove excessive, and that either might encounter severe weather problems posed by strong tides and unpredictable ice conditions. Construction of a causeway, on the other hand, at an estimated \$10,000,000, presented few of the risks posed by a bridge or tunnel, although it would produce as yet unknown tidal and environmental effects on the strait. Still, MacLachlan argued, a causeway, with a canal to permit passage of vessels of appropriate size, remained the most feasible option. He argued that the engineering feat required would be "very special" as there was no other "job in the universe like it" owing to the extraordinary depth of the water and the rapid tidal surges. Testifying on behalf of CNR, Fairweather reviewed transportation problems posed by the existing ferry system, especially the slow movement of coal and steel off Cape Breton Island. This slow movement of coal and steel severely hindered the company's abilities to meet the high demand for these natural resources. As it stood, it took the ferry system about seven-and-a-half hours to move a complete freight train from one side of the strait to the other, severely limiting the volume of materials that could be ferried off the island at any given time. These limitations forced CNR to import coal from the United States into the Maritimes to ensure the war effort would not be imperiled.¹²

11 E.R. Forbes, "Consolidating Disparity: The Maritimes and the Industrialization of Canada during the Second World War," *Acadiensis* XV, no. 2 (Spring 1986), 3-27. This development has been contested by R.A. Young's "'and the people will sink into despair': Reconstruction in New Brunswick, 1942-52," *Canadian Historical Review* 69 (June 1988), 127-66. For some of the implications regarding transportation, see T. Stephen Henderson "A Defensive Alliance: The Maritime Provinces and the Turgeon Commission on Transportation, 1948-1951," *Acadiensis* XXXV, no. 2 (Spring 2006), 46-53.

12 Canada, *Special Committee on Reconstruction and Re-Establishment*, "Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence," no. 15, 21 May 1943, 387, 390, 398.

The idea of a permanent link also reinforced another reconstruction issue addressed by the committee. Putting “men to work after the war, where they would give a return to the country and be working instead of receiving the dole,” was an important motivator. While generally concerned with solving the transportation problems at the strait, Clarie Gillis, CCF member of the House of Commons from Glace Bay, asserted “it is the duty of this committee to find work in the postwar period.” A project of such immense proportions had the possibility of creating employment for thousands of veterans for several years. Fairweather estimated that any one of the three options had the possibility of creating upwards of 7,000 man-hours of work spread over a period of three years. At the close of the proceedings the committee recommended that feasibility studies be undertaken no later than 1946 in order to determine what type of structure was best suited for crossing the strait.¹³ Its report presumed the federal government would play an active role in economic development everywhere in the country in the post-war era. The following year, a provincially organized reconstruction commission placed a permanent link between the mainland and Cape Breton atop its priority list. Chaired by R. McGregor Dawson, a native Nova Scotian and prominent political scientist from the University of Toronto, the commission suggested that transportation in Nova Scotia “must be improved before the [coal and steel] industry can hold its own against competition either within or without the Dominion.” The commission concluded that building a causeway or bridge “seem[s] admirably designed both to provide long-term employment and to achieve an end which is probably justifiable on economic as well as on other grounds.” Bridging the strait would also provide reliable and effective connections for CNR in the Maritimes for the movement of both freight and passengers. A substantial improvement in tourist facilities and to highways throughout the province, additions to the provincial parks system, and reconstruction of the Fortress of Louisbourg as a signature destination to attract tourists were also included in the final report’s recommendations, presaging many of the developments that would occur in the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁴

In 1945 Macdonald returned from Ottawa to resume the premiership, though he had never been far from provincial concerns during his time as a federal minister. His return signaled that a permanent crossing across the Strait of Canso would come to the forefront of Nova Scotia’s post-war rehabilitation strategy. Macdonald used all of his connections from four years in Ottawa to attract federal support for the project. As both the chief negotiator and the symbolic head of the campaign for the link, he cajoled lobby groups into existence, broadened the scope of support to include an array of representatives from across the province and region, and ensured that the issue stayed before the public whenever interest flagged. Yet although the permanent link had garnered broad support after the war, by 1947 there was still hesitation and delay. In July of that year a delegation of Cape Bretoners journeyed to Ottawa to lobby the federal government. The delegation included Premier Macdonald, William Wilson, chief engineer at Dominion Steel, J.E. McCurdy of the Associated Board of

13 Canada, *Special Committee on Reconstruction and Re-Establishment*, “Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence,” no. 15, 21 May 1943, 387–400, 404.

14 “Report on Iron and Steel,” *The Nova Scotia Report to the Royal Commission on Provincial Development and Rehabilitation* (Halifax: King’s Printers, 1944), 2, 9, 21, 25, 26, 54.

Trade, and prominent local building supply merchant M.R. Chappell, who was the new president of the Board of Trade's Canso Crossing Committee. They met with Lionel Chevrier, the federal minister of transport, C.D. Howe, the reconstruction minister, and J.L. Ilsely, the minister of finance and the new regional cabinet member for Nova Scotia. A memorandum summarizing this meeting singled out the federal government's initial reluctance to consider funding for anything beyond improving ferry and terminal facilities.¹⁵ Following the meeting, Clarie Gillis chided Chevrier in the House of Commons about the project's status and demanded a commitment to action. Chevrier responded that while the government was proposing to initiate ferry improvements at an estimated cost of \$4,500,000, it continued to consider the possibility of a bridge or a causeway.¹⁶ Even though the delegation had received no firm promises, the federal government's desire to boost the Cape Breton economy and to modernize the coal and steel industries would eventually work towards a favourable decision regarding a permanent crossing.

The Sydney-based Canso Crossing Association, established in 1948 at Macdonald's instigation, had lofty goals. In their 1948 publication, *The Permanent Crossing Over the Strait of Canso*, the association expressed its mandate as "lead[ing] and co-ordinat[ing] the efforts of all those sympathetic to this project as a paramount factor in developing freer trade, in the advancement of industry, the promotion of employment and the establishment of better understanding between the people of Cape Breton and their fellow Canadians." The absence of a permanent link was forcing Cape Bretoners "to live within an artificially restricted economy" that "perpetuate[d] handicaps" already faced by a coal industry competing against other national and international sources of energy.¹⁷ The association would maintain a

15 "Memo of Meeting: Strait of Canso Bridge," MG 2, vol. 981, folder 2/10, Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management (NSARM). The meeting included a wide-ranging discussion that touched upon Nova Scotia's high unemployment and out-migration rates. At the time there were an estimated 5,163 unemployed people in Cape Breton, 1,857 in the Pictou area, and 3,500 in Halifax. An additional 1,700 had left the province since the war to find work elsewhere. Out-migration was having a huge impact on the region. Kari Levitt estimated Nova Scotia net migration for the period 1941-51 at around 39,000; between 1951 and 1956 another 11,000 or so were lost – a loss that Levitt argues resulted, in part, because of increased economic opportunities in other regions. See Kari Levitt, *Population Movements in the Atlantic Provinces* (Halifax: Atlantic Provinces Economic Council, 1960), 49, 69, 77.

16 Chevrier assured Gillis the government would consider every possibility, but he was unable to make a decision until the reports and recommendations of the CNR and Department of Transport engineers were submitted. See *House of Commons Debates*, 17 July 1947, 1-3. Over his years in Ottawa, Gillis would become a watchdog for the Canso project in the House of Commons. Elected in 1940 as the first and only CCF Member of Parliament (MP) from Atlantic Canada, he was the first-ever coal miner to serve as an MP in Canada. A highlight of his 17 years of parliamentary service would be his energetic pursuit of the Canso crossing project. See Gerry Harrop, *Clarie: Clarence Gillis, MP, 1940-1957* (Hantsport: Lancelot Press, 1987), 44-54. Gillis had, for the most part, a good working relationship with Angus L. Macdonald – on this issue at least.

17 "Suggestions For Strait of Canso Coordinating Group," MG 2, vol. 981, folder 3/89, NSARM; Macdonald to Doucet, 9 April 1948, MG2, vol. 981, folder 1/2, NSARM and Canso Crossing Association, *The Permanent Crossing Over the Strait of Canso* (Sydney: Canso Crossing Association, 23 December 1948), pp. 3, 7, MG 2, vol. 981, folder 3/92, NSARM. In addition to local lobby groups, the Transportation Committee of the Maritime Board of Trade had continued to support a permanent

running consultation with Angus L. on all aspects of the project for the next ten years, as typified by the association's secretary-treasurer, Laurence Doucet, sending a draft to Macdonald asking for "any expression, alteration, deletion or additions [you] would care to suggest" prior to Doucet issuing a press release to the *Sydney Post Record* following the announcement that a low-level bridge might be constructed.¹⁸ The care with which the premier cultivated this group signaled its role in keeping pressure on the federal government in ways the provincial government might find uncomfortable.

When Newfoundland's entry into Confederation became a pressing issue after 1947, a new set of imperatives pushed discussion of a permanent link to the top of the national agenda.¹⁹ Bridging the Strait of Canso would provide improved communication not just between Cape Breton and the mainland, but would link Newfoundland and Canada more effectively. Such a link also found resonance in projects such as the Trans-Canada Highway, which was being designed as a federal-provincial initiative to symbolically and practically unite the country. Macdonald argued that a permanent link to Cape Breton had to be part of any new Trans-Canada Highway, as such a link would be the only point of access to Cape Breton and, by extension, Newfoundland.²⁰ David Monaghan has suggested that the highway proposal was also designed to generate employment throughout the country and to increase provincial revenue through tourism; both aims would resonate well in post-war Nova Scotia.²¹ At the local level the Canso project's supporters refracted the highway's broader aim of facilitating industrial development while easing the transition to a peacetime economy. Both the new highway and the strait crossing would symbolize the state's new found role in community and economic development, typifying a new and more aggressive state-planning system at the national level.

strait crossing. The committee pointed out that the cost of bridging the strait, estimated at \$12,000,000 by Fairweather, was equal to just a few years of the cost of maintaining the existing ferry system, which was sufficient reason for undertaking the permanent link. The proposal, the board argued, was a viable "reconstruction" project that would serve as "a work in the public interest" while also serving to increase tourism to the province. See "Memorandum in the Matter of the Proposed Bridge or Causeway at the Strait of Canso," Transportation Committee of the Maritime Board of Trade, 5 June 1946, pp. 7-8, MG 2, vol. 981, folder 1/13, NSARM. See also "Annual Meeting of the Maritime Board of Trade," *Maritime Advocate* 39, no. 4 (November 1948), 27-8.

18 Doucet to Macdonald, 28 March 1949, MG 2, vol. 982, folder 1/41, NSARM; Macdonald to Doucet, 30 March 1949, MG 2, vol. 982, folder 1/40, NSARM; Doucet to Macdonald, 26 April 1949, MG 2, vol. 982, folder 1/43, NSARM. A personal recollection of the activities of the committee is given in "How We Got the Canso Causeway," Ron Caplan, ed., *Cape Breton's Magazine*, no. 25 (June 1979), 31-8. It includes interviews with M.R. Chappell and Harold Devereaux of the committee and Harry Mackenzie, who supervised much of the dumping of 10,000,000 tons of granite into the strait from the mainland side.

19 "Memo of Meeting: Strait of Canso Bridge," MG 2, vol. 981, folder 2/10, NSARM and *Road to the Isle*, n.p..

20 Macdonald to Lionel Chevrier, 23 December 1948, MG 2, vol. 981, folder 3/130, NSARM.

21 David Monaghan, "Canada's New Main-street: The Trans-Canada Highway as Idea and Reality, 1912-1956" (master's thesis, University of Ottawa, 1997). A more recent and popular account of the building of the highway is Daniel Francis, *A Road for Canada: The Illustrated Story of the Trans-Canada Highway* (Vancouver: Stanton Atkins, 2006).

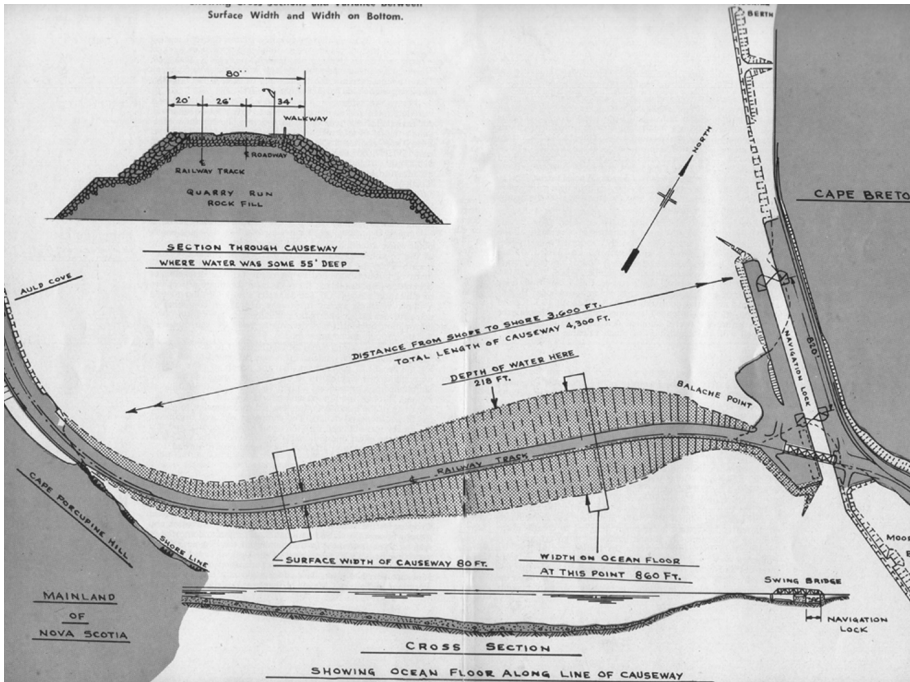


Figure 2: Schematic of the Canso Causeway and Canal, 1953. The final design had to accommodate very active tidal surges from the south as well as heavy winds and winter/spring ice on the north side of the strait. The curved pathway and wide base accomplished this. The canal was cut through Ballanche Point on the Cape Breton side. Virtually all the fill came from the mainland side, from the immediately adjacent Cape Porcupine, which was hollowed out to provide the fill. See *The Canso Crossing's History and Impact: Gut of Canso Museum and Archives*, http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/pm.php?id=record_detail&fl=0&lg=English&ex=00000222 (accessed 8 April 08).

But by the spring of 1948, with little evidence of progress being made to undertake a permanent crossing, Macdonald feared the project was losing momentum. Five years had passed since the recommendations of the Special Committee of the House of Commons and still no engineering surveys or concrete proposals had been finalized. In an effort to re-energize the project, the premier proposed a three-person committee to review the project's status "with fresh minds and give a fair and unbiased and new judgment." In letters to Chevrier, Macdonald expressed dissatisfaction with D.W. McLachlan of the Department of Transportation (who opposed construction of a bridge).²² The premier even impugned McLachlan's

22 Macdonald to Chevrier, 3 January 1948, MG 2, vol. 981, folder 3/3, NSARM; Macdonald to Chevrier, 12 January 1948, MG 2, vol. 981, folder 3/9, NSARM; Macdonald to Chevrier, 14 January 1948, p. 2, MG 2, vol. 981, folder 3/15, NSARM.

reputation: "I doubt if Mr. McLachlan commands the whole hearted respect of the engineering profession in this country. In fact, I would go so far as to say that I do not think he does."²³ When Doucet, of the Canso Crossing Association, echoed Macdonald's concerns in a note to Chevrier, the minister replied, rather noncommittally, that the association would be kept up-to-date on developments.²⁴

Ultimately, Chevrier's reluctance to commit to "improvements" to the "present facilities" led him to accede to Macdonald's proposal for a new committee.²⁵ Later in January, a Strait of Canso Board of Engineers Committee, to be made up of three "unbiased" engineers, was tasked to inquire and report on all possibilities for crossing the strait. P.L. Pratley of Montreal would represent Nova Scotia.²⁶ Arthur Surveyor, also of Montreal, and Douglas S. Ellis, dean of engineering at Queen's University, would represent the federal government.²⁷ A year later the committee finally recommended construction of a low-level bridge capable of carrying both train and road traffic. On 14 March 1949 the Canadian and Nova Scotia governments jointly announced an agreement to start construction on the structure.²⁸ But pushing forward with the strait crossing would be complicated by developments on the Trans-Canada Highway project. In February 1950, after almost a year of engineering work on the project, Pratley was instructed that the bridge would have to conform to specifications for the new highway, which required a road width of 24 feet, instead of the 22 feet called for in the original specifications. However, redesigning the low-level bridge to meet these new requirements would have delayed construction start-up by several months and added at least another \$500,000 to design costs even before ground was broken on the project. The proposed low-level bridge suffered a fatal blow six months later when Nova Scotia highway and CNR officials concluded that Pratley's plan would have to be abandoned in light of the new Trans-Canada Highway standards. On 8 September 1950, Chevrier acknowledged these necessary changes rendered Pratley's design unsafe, a finding later confirmed by M.D. Rawding, Nova Scotia's new minister of highways and public works.²⁹ Chevrier quickly reconvened the Board of Engineers. After conferring with representatives from the Nova Scotia government and the CNR, the

23 In 1943 he had estimated the cost of a bridge at \$20,000,000 and a causeway at \$7,900,000. By 1948 these estimates had ballooned to \$54,000,000 and \$35,000,000 respectively. It is unclear why exactly Macdonald was exasperated with McLachlan. It is clear, though, that frustration over the project's delay and the mushrooming cost estimates caused tensions to greatly increase. See Macdonald to Chevrier, 12 January 1948, MG 2, vol. 981, folder 3/9, NSARM. Macdonald accused McLachlan of not having "given sufficient thought" to the problem, arguing that this huge discrepancy over a five-year period was unreasonable and that this left most people unsure of what the estimates included.

24 Doucet to Chevrier, 14 January 1948, MG 2, vol. 981, folder 3/15, NSARM.

25 Chevrier to Macdonald, 8 January 1948, MG 2, vol. 981, folder 3/6, NSARM.

26 Macdonald to Chevrier, telegram, 30 January 1948, MG 2, vol. 981, folder 3/41, NSARM.

27 Chevrier to Macdonald, telegram, 5 February 1948, MG 2, vol. 981, folder 3/41, NSARM.

28 On 3 February 1949 Macdonald offered that one-third of the construction costs of the bridge be borne by the province, or the sum of \$5,000,000, depending on which figure proved to be the lesser. See Macdonald to Chevrier, 3 February 1949, MG 2, vol. 982, folder 1/3, NSARM. Several days later, Chevrier accepted the offer on behalf of the Canadian government. See Chevrier to Macdonald, 8 February 1949, MG 2, vol. 982, folder 1/5, NSARM.

29 Chevrier to Macdonald, 8 September 1950, MG 2, vol. 982, folder 2/44, NSARM; Rawding to Macdonald, 11 September 1950, p. 2, MG 2, vol. 982, folder 2/45, NSARM.

board recommended that a causeway be built in place of the proposed bridge.³⁰

Lunenburg County's Robert Winters, the new federal minister of resources and development, argued that the causeway should be moved forward as quickly as possible in a note to Chevrier. In a marginal note appended to the copy sent to Macdonald, Winters cautioned: "Angus: This is something we will have to try to watch pretty closely from now on or we will lose out on [the] project. Bob." Winters had warned Chevrier that if a permanent link was not constructed soon, improvements of the ferry and terminal system should be regarded as a "last resort because any such project would be most unacceptable indeed to the province of Nova Scotia, and especially Cape Breton, who have held such high hopes of getting a more permanent crossing."³¹ Thankfully for the proponents of the permanent link, improvements to the ferry system did not have to be re-examined. In the summer of 1951 the Board of Engineers concluded that "the causeway scheme remains as the only practical solution to the problem."³² The total cost for construction was estimated at \$22,760,000, over twice what had been projected just a few years earlier. On receiving his copy of this final report, Macdonald informed Chevrier that Nova Scotia accepted the terms, offering to pay \$5,500,000 of the total cost.³³ Finally, on 11 September 1951, the federal cabinet accepted the recommendation and a joint press release on 9 October announced construction could begin.

By the time the strait crossing was finally completed on 31 December 1954, ten million tons of granite would be deposited into the strait, which represented more than 27 months of virtually continuous work at a final cost of \$23,000,000.³⁴ The causeway finally opened to rail and road traffic in May 1955 as Nova Scotians finally realized their dream of bridging the Strait of Canso. But before construction was completed, the causeway's most influential and dedicated advocate passed from the scene. After leading his Liberals to another sweeping majority in the 1953 election, Angus L. Macdonald resumed a rigorous and demanding political schedule, quelling rumors of his retirement. After a trip to Scotland following the election, his health declined rapidly. Despite ongoing concern from friends, provincial legislative colleagues, and associates in Ottawa, Macdonald maintained his full workload until 11 April 1954, when he was hospitalized following a heart attack. Two days later he died in his sleep.³⁵

30 Federal Department of Transport, the Nova Scotia Department of Highways and Public Works, and the Strait of Canso Board of Engineers, *Report on the Problems of Crossing the Strait of Canso* (1951), MG 2, vol 982, folder 3/90, NSARM.

31 Winters to Chevrier, copied to Macdonald, 19 September 1950, MG 2, vol. 982, folder 2/59, NSARM.

32 Federal Department of Transport, the Nova Scotia Department of Highways and Public Works, and the Strait of Canso Board of Engineers, *Report on the Problem of Crossing the Strait of Canso* (1951), p. 10, MG 2, vol. 982, folder 3/90, NSARM.

33 Macdonald to Chevrier, 16 August 1951, MG 2, vol. 982, folder 3/54, NSARM; see also, in terms of proposing the payment by the province, Macdonald to Chevrier, 5 September 1951, MG 2, vol. 982, folder 3/55, NSARM.

34 *Post Record*, 17 September 1952; Doucet, *Road to the Isle*.

35 Henderson, *Macdonald*, 207-9.



Figure 3: A rather somber-looking group of CNR officials presided over the ribbon-cutting ceremony conducted by CNR President Donald Gordon in May 1955, who declared that the Canso Causeway was now open to both train and vehicular traffic. See CN Photo Collection, CN000158, Canada Science and Technology Museum.

A “mammoth gathering of the clans”:

Modern and Antimodern at the Canso Causeway Opening Ceremonies

The Canso Causeway finally opened to vehicular and rail traffic on 15 May 1955, although the day was met with relatively little ceremony. Construction work remained ongoing in connection with dredging the site and removing the caissons, and the heavy trucking associated with this work would not be completed until later that summer.³⁶ There was still considerable work to be done as well with the approach roads from both sides, though work proceeded quickly on this during the early summer. A special committee appointed by George Marler, the federal minister of transport, set 13 August as the day to officially celebrate the achievement of bridging the strait. J.L. Wickwire, chief engineer with Nova Scotia’s Department of Highways and Public Works, had recommended Saturday, 13 August, as an appropriate day for the official celebrations, noting that final construction work on the project would not

³⁶ Caissons are watertight, chamber-like structures used during underwater construction for such projects as causeways, bridges, and piers.

be completed before 26 July. Taking into account other regional festivals and events, Wickwire noted that they could capitalize on the presence of local citizens, visitors, and former Nova Scotia residents who would be in the region for events such as the Scottish Gathering at St. Ann's and the Highland Games in Antigonish – thereby guaranteeing a large number of attendees at the ceremony. The fact that it also coincided with the last weekend of the traditional two-week holiday of miners and steelworkers in the Sydney area helped ensure a good crowd.³⁷

The committee overseeing the official opening ceremonies, which was appointed by George Marler, consisted of Wickwire as the provincial government representative, J. Roy Baxter, chairman of Personnel and Information Services with the federal Department of Transportation, and W.R. Wright, director of public relations for Canadian National Railways.³⁸ This committee took charge of the opening ceremonies, overseeing everything from protocol for invited and special guests to organizing free bus transportation in conjunction with Acadian Lines. Calum MacLeod, director of Celtic Studies at St. Francis Xavier University, was brought on as the "Gaelic Advisor," overseeing the organization of the large number of pipe bands that would participate in the ceremony. Lawrence Doucet was charged with preparing and arranging for the distribution of *The Road to the Isle* as an official commemoration of the occasion, which would be handed out at no charge during the ceremonies.

The ceremony inaugurating the Canso Causeway on 13 August 1955 proved to be an enormous success. An estimated 40,000 people attended, which was 15,000 more than anticipated.³⁹ To a large degree this massive event focused on commemorating Angus L. Macdonald's role in promoting the causeway. People traveled from all corners of the province to attend the historic occasion. Civic holidays were declared in many communities to allow people to travel to the Strait of Canso for the ceremony.⁴⁰ CNR arranged special trains from Halifax and Sydney for the event, and Acadian Lines, the province's major bus line, offered free transport to the strait for all those it could accommodate. Even with this service, the thousands of vehicles converging on the area produced the heaviest volume of traffic in provincial history, creating such tie-ups that drivers were forced to obtain permission to park in private fields. In anticipation of the crowds, people had started arriving the night before the

37 "Meeting of the Special Committee Appointed on Instructions of Deputy Minister of Transport to Plan Date and Ceremonials for Canso Causeway Opening," 25 February 1955, RG 12, file 1606-86, vol. 1, part 1, Library and Archives Canada (LAC). The phrase "mammoth gathering of the clans" is from F.R. Sayer, "Colourful Ceremonies Mark Causeway Opening," *Canadian National Magazine* 41, no. 8 (September 1955), 7. The decision of the committee overseeing the opening ceremonies to set 13 August 1955 as the ceremonial opening day for the Canso Causeway was followed by an official statement from Minister of Transportation George Marler announcing same; see "Statement for Minister, Re: Canso Causeway for Orders of the Day," n.d., RG 12, file 1606-87, vol. 1, part 1, LAC and "Press Release #564," Department of Transport, Ottawa, 10 March 1955, RG 12, file 1606-87, vol. 1, part 1, LAC.

38 J.R. Baxter to H. Reid MacPherson, telegram, 26 August 1955, RG 12, file 1606-87, vol. 1, part 1, LAC. Surprisingly, the Canso Crossing Association took on a somewhat muted role in the opening day ceremonies considering the association's active and prominent initial involvement in lobbying for the construction of the permanent link.

39 *Post Record*, 15 August 1955.

40 *The Guysboro County Advocate and Canso Breeze*, 12 August 1955.



Figure 4: Premier Henry Hicks and the assembled crowd look on as C.D. Howe uses an ancient Scottish claymore (two-edged broadsword) to cut the Nova Scotian tartan ribbon. The claymore is said to have been at the Battle of Culloden in 1746. See The Canso Crossing's History and Impact: Gut of Canso Museum and Archives, http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/pm.php?id=record_detail&fl=0&lg=English&ex=00000222 (accessed 8 April 08).

ceremony to capture prime locations to witness the event.⁴¹ Thousands of copies of the *Official Souvenir Program*, along with Lawrence Doucet's commemorative pamphlet, *The Road to the Isle*, were produced for distribution to attendees.

The 30-minute ceremony, conducted at the mainland approach to the Canso Causeway on a hastily erected dais, began with two brief invocations: one by the Venerable A.F. Arnold, Anglican archdeacon of Cape Breton, and a Gaelic language greeting from Father Stanley P. Macdonald, Angus L. Macdonald's older brother.⁴²

41 *Halifax Chronicle Herald*, 13 August 1955.

42 Father Stanley took the occasion to condemn organizers of the opening day ceremonies for leaving so little time for a proper Gaelic celebration, owing to their being from Ottawa. See Beryl MacDonald, "Gaelic Slight Provided Father Stanley Ammunition," *The Scotia Sun*, 10 August 1995 and Linden MacIntyre, *Causeway: A Passage from Innocence* (Toronto: HarperCollins Canada, 2006). A portion of Father Stanley's remarks is included in Henderson, *Macdonald*, 211.

Premier Henry Hicks, CNR's Donald Gordon, and Agnes Macdonald, Angus L.'s widow, all repeated the acknowledgment of contributions by everyone involved with the project, but they and others ensured that no one received greater recognition than "Angus L." himself. Donald Gordon exclaimed "the moment properly belongs to him"; Agnes Macdonald proclaimed "without his dream and his determination, there would not be a 'Road to the Isles' for us to officially open here today"; and C.D. Howe stated "No man worked harder for this unifying link than Angus L. Macdonald."⁴³ Bishop John R. Macdonald of Antigonish officially blessed the causeway, extending a hope that it would promote a new sense of unity throughout Canada and renewed strength among Nova Scotians.⁴⁴ George Marler, the master of ceremonies, heralded the Canso Causeway as the result of hard work by community leaders, politicians, engineers, and workers alike. Then, at exactly 2:25 pm, Howe cut the ribbon; there was a salute by both the Royal Canadian Navy and the Royal Canadian Air Force and then 100 pipers, followed by the official party and many of the thousands of attendees, walked across the causeway to Cape Breton where the festivities extended through the afternoon.⁴⁵

Images, actions, and speeches throughout the day presented the Canso Causeway as a modern gateway to Cape Breton's old world charm, a notion endorsed by insiders and outsiders alike. That the causeway would forever alter access to and from the island was a given. It would also, however, become a cultural icon that symbolized easy access to the traditionally Scottish Cape Breton.⁴⁶ The event's climax, the "March of the Hundred Pipers" across the causeway to Cape Breton all playing "The Road to the Isles," was calculated to stir the hearts of all those who were there that day. There was no shortage of pipers as St. Ann's Gaelic College was in session and the Antigonish Highland Games were on as well.

The paradoxical mix of the modern and the antimodern found in this celebration has been explored by Ian McKay, who argues that Scottish ideals and perceptions about Nova Scotia society were well entrenched by the 1950s.⁴⁷ He maintains that "fisherfolk" and descendants of the early Scottish settlers were "discovered" between the wars as essentialist carriers of the province's traditions and folkways, and

43 *Halifax Chronicle Herald*, 15 August 1955. Macdonald's unstinting work on behalf of a causeway, in fact, had led to proposals that it be named for him – a move he had discouraged before his death. A few months before the opening of the causeway, though, the provincial government named the newly completed bridge across Halifax harbour in his honour, with the ribbon-cutting ceremony conducted by his widow Agnes.

44 *Post Record*, 15 August 1955.

45 *Halifax Chronicle Herald*, 15 August 1955. For many, this included celebrants attending the Highland Games in Antigonish, which were taking place that day. In addition, Premier Hicks had to leave the celebrations almost immediately, as an equally large gathering was being held the following day at Grand Pre; the Acadian community was rededicating the statue and chapel to Evangeline in commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the expulsion of the Acadians. This truly was one of the busiest weeks of commemoration in the province's history.

46 For discussion of the perceived "Scottishness" of the province and Angus L. Macdonald's part in this mythologizing, see Ian McKay "Tartanism Triumphant: The Construction of Scottishness in Nova Scotia, 1933-1954," *Acadiensis* XXI, no. 2 (Spring 1993), 5-47.

47 Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994) and McKay, "History and the Tourist Gaze: Politics and Commemoration in Nova Scotia, 1935-1964," *Acadiensis* XXII, no. 2 (Spring 1993), 102-38.



Figure 5: The 100 pipers were followed by the official party and a huge crowd. It is estimated that more than half of the approximately 40,000 people in attendance took the opportunity to cross the causeway that day. This ceremony would be repeated, virtually unchanged, at both the 25th and 50th anniversary celebrations. This and several other photos from 13 August all emphasize the enormous crowds that flocked to the opening, many of them crossing the new causeway on foot. See *The Canso Crossing's History and Impact: Gut of Canso Museum and Archives*, http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/pm.php?id=record_detail&fl=0&lg=English&ex=00000222 (accessed 8 April 08).

systematically portrayed as such in official publications as belonging to a culture and society inherently different from other North American places. This concept of another time and place was packaged and sold, McKay argues, along with the province's natural landscapes and seacoasts, as the basis of a comprehensive tourism strategy. This antimodern idea was embraced by "middle class cultural producers" and "created through framing and distilling procedures carried out in thought, and then set into practice through processes of selection and invention."⁴⁸ Under Angus L.'s watchful eye, Nova Scotia, rechristened as a "New World Scotland," would soon come to sell his version of Cape Breton as a tourism destination like no other. It was convenient that the island, much like Scotland, could be divided into a "Lowland" industrial core, with the ravages of industrialization, class conflict, and the curse of urbanization, and a more pristine "Highland" area consecrated with a national park and surrounded by the rural remnants of a Scottish diaspora, which had populated the area earlier in the 19th century. It would take some time for this trope to be fully realized, but its pursuit would

48 McKay, *Quest of the Folk*, 8, 28-36.

dominate much of the tourist strategy of the coming decades.⁴⁹

The rise of “tartanism” had been gradual, but without Macdonald’s support it might not have become such a powerful cultural and political expression.⁵⁰ Celebrations surrounding the opening of the causeway were a transitional point in this quest to brand the province, something reflected in the material produced to commemorate the event. While Doucet addressed the rise of industry on Cape Breton in his pamphlet *Road to the Isle*, he was careful also to extol the island as a landscape filled with “quaint villages resplendent with Scottish customs.”⁵¹ Doucet’s pamphlet and the *Official Souvenir Program* were also framed by Scottish motifs and plaids. The cover of the *Official Souvenir Program* featured a tartan background, and the *Road to the Isle* trope proved such an important signifier of the causeway and island tourism it was copyrighted by the province.⁵² These items were not, however, the only way the provincial government asserted control over the Scottish image that was to become so central to tourism promotion. The province had previously copyrighted a design for a Nova Scotia tartan, which had few ties to tartans in Scotland but simply asserted a “Scottish” identity. A Cape Breton tartan would not be far behind.⁵³ The *Official Souvenir Program* similarly helped buttress this notion of Cape Breton as deeply rooted in the traditions of a Celtic society based on a very general association with things that were Scottish. Its cover featured “authentic Celtic art” designed specifically for the opening, including decorative designs of the thistle, a Scottish symbol, placed around an “ancient form of Celtic Lettering.”⁵⁴ Although the cover’s inspiration derived from traditional Greek lettering and the Irish Book of Kells, there was no mistaking the dominant Scottish influence. A photograph inside the program featured a male bagpiper and two appropriately kilted young dancers, with the causeway in the background. This picture appeared in both the *Post Record* and the *Halifax Chronicle Herald* as well as in advertisements by the province congratulating itself on opening the link “in name, spirit, and ideals.”⁵⁵

Speakers at the opening paid homage to the Cape Breton’s Scottish character, often associating Angus L. with the central place it had achieved in the iconography of the island. CNR president Donald Gordon paid tribute to both the people of Cape Breton and Macdonald, while C.D. Howe spoke of his pleasure in being “among other

49 This characterization of Cape Breton parallels how Scotland itself had been re-imagined for tourist purposes, with the less populated but much more romantic highlands eclipsing the grittier south in the imaginings of the tourist promoters. See Paul Basu, *Highland Homecomings: Genealogy and Heritage-Tourism in the Scottish Diaspora* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2007).

50 McKay, *Quest of the Folk*, 16.

51 Doucet, *Road to the Isle*.

52 *Halifax Chronicle Herald*, 13 August 1955.

53 Marjorie Major, “History of the Nova Scotia Tartan,” *Nova Scotia Historical Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (June 1972): 191-214.

54 Government of Canada, *Canso Causeway Opening Souvenir Programme: Air Lorg Nan Eilean* (13 August 1955), V/F vol 56, no. 5, NSARM. Scottish motifs were also repeated in the officially sanctioned “Participation Certificates” handed out to all those with any official capacity at the ceremonies, including all the pipers and marchers.

55 *Post Record*, 10 August 1955 and *Halifax Chronicle Herald*, 13 August 1955. This “authentic” air in much of the public literature and utterances was undoubtedly the work of Calum MacLeod, who had been brought to Saint Francis Xavier University at Angus L.’s behest and was seconded to the organizing committee for “Gaelic” (i.e., Scottish) advice.

clansmen” for the opening ceremonies: “Here, too, is a colorful setting dear to the Highland heart – the gathering of the clans, the flash of the tartan, the hundred pipers marshaled for the historic march, the magic sounds of the ancient and honorable tongue and the quiet beauty of the heather-clad hills of Cape Breton in the background.” Agnes Macdonald contributed to this imagery: “The Scot has ever a wandering feet and for years, and many years, Cape Bretoners have been carrying their brains, their courage, their high ideals, and their great hearts to the four corners of the earth; and wherever they have gone, those places have been better for their coming. But no matter where they may be, or how far away they may go, their loyalty, their love for this isle and their thoughts fly homeward over a causeway known only to the heart.”⁵⁶ The opening even featured a tartan ribbon cut with a ceremonial claymore instead of the scissors usually associated with such events. *Canadian National Magazine*, the CNR’s in-house magazine, discussed efficiencies made possible by the new link, but it intermixed modern and traditional when discussing “the progress it will surely bring” while likening the ceremonies to a “mammoth gathering of the clans” (an idea also noted in the *Post Record*).⁵⁷

In subsequent years, the Canso Causeway would be feted in all manner of tributes in a number of genres.⁵⁸ At the time, it was heralded in special editions of newspapers, periodicals, souvenir programs, and tourist brochures, with many of them reinforcing the Scottish trope that had come to characterize Cape Breton in the North American imagination. The causeway’s uniqueness was portrayed as a manifestation of Nova Scotia’s coming of age, shaping the idea that Cape Breton was finally being fully drawn into the 20th century. Part of the opening day discourse presented the island’s new and improved access route as a way to revive the faltering coal and steel industries, something that had been a centerpiece for much of the early agitation for the causeway. It was argued that as these industries became more competitive within the marketplace they would serve as an incentive to attract other complementary businesses.⁵⁹ It is important to note, however, that despite these expectations the island’s coal and steel industries had exported very little of their output across the strait before the causeway’s opening, and these industries would send almost none after the link was completed. While the permanent link would indeed provide a much more efficient way of moving goods and people on and off the island, large bulk items like coal and steel, including the iron ore that was brought to Cape Breton for

56 *Halifax Chronicle Herald*, 15 August 1955. A brief film clip of the ceremony is available on the CBC website at: “Canso Causeway links Cape Breton to mainland,” *The CBC Digital Archives Website*, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, http://archives.cbc.ca/IDC-1-69-250-1269/life_society/canso_causeway/clip1 (accessed 10 March 2008).

57 Sayer, “Colorful Ceremonies Mark Causeway Opening,” 7. See also *Post Record*, 15 August 1955.

58 A poem “Angus L.,” written by H.M. Logan, eulogized Macdonald’s contribution to the project. See H.M. Logan, “Angus L.,” Elizabeth MacEachern Collection, MG 12, 103.2 (c), Beaton Institute (BI). As noted by Charlotte MacInnes, a specially composed “Causeway Song” was said to have been “sung at a Scottish concert in our parish hall [in nearby Creignish] shortly after the opening of the Causeway”; those words were written as an aside on the piece of paper that had lyrics to the song. See Charlotte MacInnes, Creignish, “The Causeway Song,” Elizabeth MacEachern Collection, MG 12, 103.2 (c), BI. Probably the most widely known and publicized reflection was Dan Lewis MacDonald, “The Bochdan Bridge of Canso,” Dan Lewis MacDonald Collection, MG 15, 35, BI.

59 *Halifax Chronicle Herald*, 15 August 1955.

smelting, were always shipped by water – primarily to and from piers at Sydney and Louisburg (both of which continued to be used after the causeway's completion). About 25 per cent of Cape Breton coal was shipped across the Strait of Canso prior to 1955, but most of it was destined for other parts of Nova Scotia or the region rather than for export markets; the replacement of coal by diesel fuel on virtually all trains in the region gradually eliminated much of this requirement as well. Despite the ongoing discourse of reviving the flagging coal and steel industries, the causeway never proved instrumental in increasing their prosperity or efficiency. Invocations of future economic development through the embrace of modernity, though, tended to be obscured in the face of more pervasive portrayal of Scottish ideals such as on 13 August 1955. The *Halifax Chronicle Herald* epitomized this mix of modern and antimodern at the opening day in its editorial pages:

We have heard the shrill, inciting tones of the Hundred Pipers playing "The Road to the Isles," the tramp of marching feet has faded but "quiet blue eyes in the Dun are weeping" because a hero in the ranks of Clan Ranald was missing today, the "Skipper" and true Gael, the late Angus L. Macdonald. How handsome is the Causeway as it challenges the turbulent challenges of the Strait? How convenient is man's inventiveness? A sturdy, smooth-surfaced road now links the mainland of Nova Scotia to Cape Breton. According to some, this is present day progress. We hope that as a result of this progress we shall never forget the heritage and independent spirit of our valiant progenitors who sailed away from coasts of Scotland to voyage over the dark-blue waves of the deep in search of the Promised Land.⁶⁰

As part of the Trans-Canada Highway, the Canso Causeway would play a symbolic role in promoting the idea of a continuous link across the entire country by featuring tourists enjoying more easy access to both Cape Breton and Newfoundland. After its official opening, tourist literature featured the link, both as a project to facilitate travel into the area and as an attraction in and of itself. Prominent tourist travel magazines, such as *Oval*, *Travel*, and *Canadian National Magazine*, promoted tourism to the region. F.R. Sayer's article "Colorful Ceremonies Mark Causeway Opening" promoted the advantages of the link to would-be Island-bound travelers. Describing the causeway's opening-day celebrations, the magazines pointed to an "atmosphere charged with nostalgia" where "the crowds of proud Nova Scotians" gathered to celebrate bringing the island out of its isolation while preserving and accentuating its perceived traditional ways.⁶¹ A Nova Scotia Department of Trade and Industry tourism pamphlet, "Nova Scotia Camera Tour," stated "gone with the March of the Hundred Pipers on opening day, was the old-time isolation of the Celtic Isle."⁶² A pamphlet produced by Tauck Tours of Boston promoting package bus travel to Cape

⁶⁰ *Halifax Chronicle Herald*, 13 August 1955.

⁶¹ Sayer, "Colorful Ceremonies Mark Causeway Opening," 6-7.

⁶² Nova Scotia Department of Trade and Industry, *Nova Scotia Camera Tour* (Halifax, NS: Nova Scotia Department of Trade and Industry, 195[?]), F91 N85 N85, NSARM.

Breton, specifically the Cabot Trail, extolled the virtues of the new facilities and improvements. Claiming that the island had once been “for all practical purposes inaccessible,” the pamphlet featured the causeway as but one improvement, along with “modern highways” and “deluxe hotels,” and other modern facilities, which had replaced the “old roads” that had “reminded one of Old Scotland.”⁶³ This was somewhat wishful thinking at this early date; but the promise of a more modern access to the Cape Breton Highlands National Park would be central to the future development of a tourist strategy.

“The place went flat . . .”: The Promise of Progress

The Canso Causeway would prove a double-edged sword for the communities surrounding the Strait of Canso. Communities that had flourished during the construction phase, with plenty of opportunities for jobs associated with the project, were soon faced with the harsh realities of the loss of the CNR as the area’s primary employer. The opening of the causeway brought economic and social dislocation, followed by a flurry of out-migration by those left unemployed with the closing of ferry and railway terminals. Even the busy railroad station at Mulgrave was closed down. Eva and Leonard O’Neil testified: “The people here made their living from the CNR. When the Canso Causeway opened, that was the end – they were all unemployed . . . there was no possibility of even selling the house. The place went flat . . .”⁶⁴ O’Neil, as Mulgrave’s mayor, had direct knowledge of the chronic underemployment and economic devastation in communities on the mainland side of the strait, where much of the ferry-associated work was located. When the CNR closed its offices, many employees had to travel in search for work elsewhere. With little alternative employment at home – the causeway toll booth, which opened in May 1955, would employ only a handful of those former CNR employees – hundreds of ferry and railroad workers were forced to sojourn in other areas of the province or abandon the region altogether in order to support their families. Some found work on the new Newfoundland ferries operation out of North Sydney while others moved to Yarmouth to work on the Bar Harbour run; a few went to Bras d’Or to work on the Ross ferry – only to be displaced again a few years later with completion of the Seal Island Bridge and the new Trans-Canada Highway route over Kelly’s Mountain. Colin Purcell, also of Mulgrave, remembered the opening of the causeway in a non-celebratory way:

You know for us here in Mulgrave, for most of us it was no celebration, it was the end of our livelihood. . . . Prior to the Causeway being open the town officials had contacted provincial MLAs and federal MPs and what not and the end result was it [*sic*] was nothing they could do to help the town. . . . There were 300 families depending on the two car ferries and the railway it was a

63 Promotion of the Canso Causeway and Cape Breton was not confined to print. Two films from the time of the opening of the causeway – *Road to Keltic* (1956) and *Identity* (1955) – portrayed it serving primarily a tourist function. See Adrian Willsher, “‘Where are the roads?’ The Tourist and Industrial Promotion Films of the Nova Scotia Film Bureau, 1945-1970” (master’s thesis, Dalhousie University, 1996), 97-8.

64 Ron Caplan, “The Pulp Mill Comes to the Strait,” *Cape Breton’s Magazine* 25 (June 1979), 31.

terminal, it was 300 families. . . . Their houses, they sold them for little or nothing. . . . [It was] a burial of the town, in other words, people all leaving, the towns never recovered.⁶⁵

Reports of these side effects of the causeway's opening were muted during the celebrations, kept far from the front pages of newspapers. The *Chronicle-Herald* alluded to the uncertain future of workers in the strait area.⁶⁶ The *Globe and Mail* noted that Mulgrave and Point Tupper protested the opening ceremonies of the causeway with "quiet objection," as they were the only towns in the area that did not declare 13 August 1955 a civic holiday.⁶⁷ Despite the anticipated economic devastation, little action was taken by the government or the CNR to provide relief or employment to those who had lost their jobs when the railway offices closed and trains started to roll across the causeway in May 1955. Mulgrave was expected to sacrifice its livelihood for the greater provincial good. As Colin Purcell remembers: "[A] lot of the car repair crew, they called them car knockers, they went down to Sydney at that time to work and some of them went up to Stellarton and to Halifax and places and the train crew went to Yarmouth and just coincidentally at that time they put new ferries down at Ross's ferry. . . . A lot of them went down to Ross's ferry to work – 'course this means leaving their homes in Mulgrave . . . [and] eventually all of them moved to Yarmouth or to Sydney."⁶⁸ This flurry of out-migration mirrored the experience of other small communities in the region, especially where livelihoods depended upon a single industry or employer.⁶⁹

In anticipation of massive disruption to the Strait of Canso area, community leaders banded together even before the formal opening of the causeway and formed the Four County Development Association. The association's aim was to lobby for provincial and federal government support in attracting new industry into the area. After various surveys and plans, the association determined that a pulp mill was the most likely candidate for the area. This conclusion was based on extensive wood reserves in all four counties and new transportation facilities, including the ice-free port created by the construction of the causeway. As early as 1955 the provincial government had started to become receptive to the association's surveys and plans, finding itself pressured by the citizens of Mulgrave who wanted the pulp and paper mill "to offset the loss of revenue represented by the operation of the ferries."⁷⁰ Within a few years, the Nova Scotia Pulp Company, a branch of the Swedish pulp and paper giant Stora Kopparberg, was finally persuaded to establish a factory at Point Tupper.

65 Colin Purcell, interview by Meaghan Beaton, tape recording, Mulgrave, 28 August 1999 (tape recording in possession of author). Mr. Purcell, a long-time resident of Mulgrave, proved an invaluable source of information in discussing the story of the Canso Causeway and the Strait of Canso area as well as the link's impact on residents of the strait area.

66 *Halifax Chronicle Herald*, 13 August 1955.

67 *Globe and Mail*: 13 August 1995, 11 August 1955, and 15 August 1955.

68 Purcell, interview by Beaton, 28 August 1999.

69 Constance P. deRoche, *The Village, the Vertex: Adaptation to Regionalism and Development in a Complex Society*, Occasional Papers in Anthropology, no. 12 (Halifax: Saint Mary's University, 1985). This ethnographic survey of the fictive community of Benton confirms that small communities were in constant crisis throughout the 1950s, which mirrored the experience of Mulgrave and Point Tupper. Rural Cape Bretoners had to constantly adjust to massive and continual out-migration. Because of constant economic change, "almost no one failed to experience periodic migration" (36).

70 *Halifax Chronicle Herald*, 17 February 1955; *Halifax Chronicle Herald*, 23 March 1955.

In a 1960 pamphlet, the association trumpeted the advantages that would accompany Stora, and pushed the area as a highly advantageous place to establish business by highlighting the area's "year round shipping facilities easily accessible to domestic and foreign markets, etc."⁷¹ Without the causeway, it argued, Stora would never have been attracted to the area.

The Canso Causeway, however, was just one incentive being used to lure business to the strait region. Nova Scotia's long courtship of pulp and paper companies had been going on for over half a century. The Lease Act of 1899 marked the beginning of a policy to "promote forest management and raise revenue from Crown lands" by making available renewable, 20-year timberland leases covering 620,000 acres of land in Victoria and Inverness counties. Hefty acreage concessions helped pave the way for Stora's move to Cape Breton and its subsequent expansion to become the area's major employer. Despite its single-industry status, Stora brought with it a new economic and industrial base that would be more tied to the rural communities of Cape Breton Island than steel and coal had been. Eastern Nova Scotia was in dire need of jobs and Stora helped to restore prosperity, both during its construction phase and in the long term. As Peter Twohig argues: "Construction expenditures topped \$42 million, generating wages and salaries of \$25 million. By 1966, the average income in Port Hawkesbury was twenty percent above the provincial average, whereas five years before it had been thirty percent lower. In the counties of Richmond and Inverness, average incomes were raised by twenty-five percent and forty-five percent, respectively. The first five years (1961-1966) saw the company pay \$23 million for pulpwood deliveries and by 1966, 423 regular employees and 130 casual employees worked at the Point Tupper mill."⁷²

The discourse of development in Cape Breton was also closely linked to the expansion of tourism as a viable alternative industry to the faltering coal and steel industries. The Canso Causeway's importance grew with the increase in motor vehicle use, a modern phenomena whose importance cannot be overstated. As Christopher Brown notes: "Throughout the 1950s tourism in Nova Scotia changed dramatically in character and content. The fantastic upsurge in automobile travel and the accompanying massive development and improvement of the province's highway system drastically altered the orientation of the industry. The trend was toward highly seasonal, relatively short-term family vacations."⁷³ With the completion of vehicle-friendly projects, Nova Scotia was

71 Four County Development Association, "Industry is Heading Straight for the Strait: Canada's New Area for Development" (Mulgrave, NS: n.p., 1960), V/F, vol. 126, no. 12, NSARM.

72 Peter Twohig, "A Preliminary Report on Pulp and Paper Manufacture in Nova Scotia, 1900-1970" (unpublished paper, 12 March 1992), 65. See also L. Anders Sandberg, "Forest Policy in Nova Scotia: The Big Lease, Cape Breton Island, 1899-1960," *Acadiensis* XX, no. 2 (Spring 1991), 105, 106, 123-5, 127-8. The so-called "Big Lease" was an initiative by the provincial Conservative government of Robert Stanfield, which was elected in 1957. This government re-appropriated portions of the land leased by Angus L. Macdonald in 1936 to the Cape Breton Highlands National Park so that it could use the acreage as an incentive to attract a pulp company into the province. Providing long-term cutting concessions on Crown lands to the pulp mills, including stumpage rates at the low cost of \$1 per cord – a price given to companies 30 years before – made the province a highly attractive place for business, but at considerable cost to the province's future maneuverability. As Anders Sandberg concluded: "The premier's major concern during this period was to secure a commitment from Stora and the content of the agreement seemed secondary" (125).

73 Christopher Brown, *The Nova Scotia Department of Tourism and the British Columbia Department of Travel Industry: A Structural Comparison* (Halifax: Dalhousie University, 1976), 10-11.

providing new accessibility aimed at drawing tourists to the area. Improvements in transportation, including upgrading provincial highways to complement the newly constructed Trans-Canada Highway, continued throughout the ensuing decades.⁷⁴

As Brown also argues, it was not until the post-Second World War era that the provincial government started to promote and develop tourism as a viable industry. Noting the massive expenditures on transportation during this period, he suggests that the province had been slow to develop “administrative units to develop this [tourism] potential” until infrastructure was in place to support it.⁷⁵ A study commissioned by the government noted the significant impact of infrastructure and highway developments on tourism: “One noticeable development, which surely has influenced this change in traffic patterns, is the completion of a major portion of the Trans-Canada Highway in Cape Breton, leading tourists directly from the Canso Causeway to Baddeck.”⁷⁶ Completion of the Seal Island Bridge across the Big Bras d’Or entrance to the Bras d’Or Lakes, along with improvements to various highways through the Cape Breton Highlands National Park, quickly made the Cabot Trail one of the major ocean scenery destinations in the world. Complementing these natural attractions was the emergence of a wide variety of heritage attractions largely completed in the 1960s, all of which depended on massive funding from the federal government. The reconstruction of the Fortress of Louisbourg and the development of both the Alexander Graham Bell Museum in Baddeck and the Cape Breton Miners Museum in Glace Bay were all heavily endowed with federal money. Intended as a make-work project for displaced miners, the restoration of the Fortress of Louisbourg would become Canada’s largest and the most expensive national historic site, illustrating the role the federal government could play in economic revival of the region.⁷⁷ Interestingly enough, these commemorative projects in the 1960s seldom capitalized on the Scottish ideals espoused at the causeway’s opening ceremonies. Arguably, this time period between completion of the causeway and the Celtic revivals of the 1980s epitomized the shift from the provincial to the national in Cape Breton as the first of many steps in coordinated regional economic development executed by the federal state.⁷⁸

74 For discussion of improvement in highway conditions to promote tourism, see letter from C.P. Disney, Engineer, to Macdonald, 15 June 1946, MG 2, vol. 981, folder 1/14, NSARM.

75 C.P. Disney, Engineer, to Macdonald, 15 June 1946, p. 23, MG 2, vol. 981, folder 1/14, NSARM. Although tourism would eventually take centre stage in the province, administratively the government was slow to react. The Tourist Bureau came under the Bureau of Information in 1942, was then switched to the Department of Industry and Trade in 1948, and then it was shuffled back to the Nova Scotia Information Bureau in 1951 and back to the Department of Trade and Industry in 1955. The Nova Scotia Travel Bureau was established in 1961, and a Ministry of Tourism in July of 1971. Currently, tourism falls under the Department of Tourism, Heritage and Culture, reflecting the development of a set of destinations tied to cultural groups associated with various parts of the province. The Scottish identity is still firmly linked to Cape Breton and eastern Nova Scotia more generally, but there are other areas where other ethnic communities are highlighted. See <http://www.gov.ns.ca/dtc/>.

76 Don Short, *Tourism-Recreation Facilities Development Study of the Province of Nova Scotia* (New York: Development Counsellors International, [1965?]).

77 Della Stanley, “The 1960s: The Illusion and Realities of Progress,” in Forbes and Muise, *Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, 434-5.

78 Debates over the ramifications of various developmental strategies attempted over the course of the 1960s to the 1990s are continuous and controversial. For discussion see Bickerton, *Nova Scotia, Ottawa and the Politics of Regional Development*, chs. 5-9; Savoie, *Regional Economic Development*, chs. 3-11; and Savoie, *Visiting Grandchildren*, chs. 4-6.

As an integral part of the Trans-Canada Highway, Cape Breton was now connected with a national infrastructure project transcending provincial borders. David Monaghan, in tracing the importance of the highway as a symbol of nation building and a means of economic rehabilitation, argues that the highway was used both as a weapon against unemployment and as a means to attract tourist dollars everywhere – particularly to places like Nova Scotia. Revenue generated through its promotion provided an “excellent rationale for increasing public expenditures on highways and strongly reinforced the Highway’s image as an investment rather than ongoing consumption.”⁷⁹ Similarly, Edward Morton documents the economic impact of the highway in developing a national tourist industry, which created 12 million days of employment. Morton also illustrates how this national infrastructure project promoted provincial governmental involvement; while the federal government provided much of the financing for the highway itself, provincial governments shared the costs and funded spin-off developments such as the expansion of camping and picnic grounds.⁸⁰ By 1963, Nova Scotia had created five new provincial parks as a direct result of the highway. Several more parks were completed in the ensuing years, which were all designed to attract more visitors to the area for extended stays.

As an industry, tourism was rapidly growing in importance for the Nova Scotian government. Many areas required improvement, however, in order to make it a viable undertaking. A 1957 report concluded that although Cape Breton’s natural attractions were incentive enough for tourists, the island lacked adequate accommodation and transportation facilities to cater to visitors, particularly affluent tourists. The province desperately needed to improve accommodation facilities and coordinate a cohesive tourism strategy. The report concluded: “If Nova Scotia is to be made more attractive to tourists, some mechanism must be found that will integrate the various businesses, associations, and groups concerned into a cohesive unit having a common goal, as well as the ability to attack through a coordinated and planned program some of the major tourist destinations.”⁸¹ These recommendations pointed to a need to integrate communities’ resources with local businesses in order to more effectively serve the tourist industry. Gerald Gabriel, in fact, later correlated the success of tourism with active community involvement in the Atlantic Canada region in the post-war era. He concludes that the more cohesive a community and the more it was able to integrate community with business interests, the better it was able to cope during times of either crisis or prosperity. Gabriel notes that there was a rise in social and cultural self-awareness in such communities, and argues that well-integrated areas are better able to take control of their economic development and survival.⁸²

This reliance upon tourism as an alternative to the coal and steel industries had been promoted at various levels of government and had received encouragement from

79 Monaghan, “Canada’s New Mainstreet,” 13.

80 Edward Morton, “The TransCanada Highway: A Stimulant to Canadian Development,” *Canadian Geographical Journal* LXVII, no. 3 (September 1963), 74-91, 79.

81 Arthur D. Little Inc., *A Statistical Analysis of Tourists Visiting Nova Scotia in 1956: A Draft Report to the Province of Nova Scotia* (Cambridge, MA: Arthur D. Little Inc, 1957).

82 Gerald Gabriel, “Towards a Community Approach to Tourism Development in Atlantic Canada” (master’s thesis, Saint Mary’s University, 1996) and Peter E. Murphy, *Tourism: A Community Approach* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 117-51, 153-4.

Angus L. Macdonald well before the completion of the Canso Causeway. Emphasizing the decline of these traditional industries, Macdonald had hoped to see a financial injection into the province to help develop and promote tourism. In a 1946 letter to C.D. Howe, he stated:

I do not think any federal action should be restricted only to development of mining areas. There are other resources in the country besides mining which, over the long run, are of much greater value to the country than mining which is a wasting asset. I do not see why, for instance, an area that has great tourist advantages, such as the Cape Breton Highlands National Park, should not stand in the same position as a mining area in this regard. We regard the tourist industry as one of our great industries in the province, and we look on the Cape Breton Park as one of our major tourist attractions. It is, of course, necessary to have good roads leading to the Park. Such roads would assist in the development of an asset that would endure as long as the province itself, and that could be made more attractive and more lucrative with each year, instead of diminishing in value each year as a mining property does.⁸³

In response, Howe claimed that the federal government had been “for some time aware of the economic situation in Cape Breton” and wished to promote economic development in that depressed area.⁸⁴ Howe, however, appeared supportive of a very particular economic development plan for the area, as he did not apparently believe that the region was capable of hosting much industrial economic development.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, Macdonald’s statement illustrates the drive to encourage tourism in Cape Breton. The emergence of tourist destinations in places such as Cheticamp, Baddeck, Ingonish, and Louisbourg – communities located outside of the Sydney-Glace Bay-New Waterford industrial area – would drive Cape Breton’s tourism activity in subsequent decades.

Reconstruction initiatives such as the Canso Causeway never produced the much-anticipated economic revival of the coal and steel sector. When the causeway first opened it was viewed as a major step towards improving prospects for exporting coal and steel off of the island. Ironically, the structure touted as facilitating exports caused a major push for Cape Breton to heavily promote the tourist industry, a notion that was reflected in several royal commissions. In August 1960, for instance, the *Report of the Royal Commission on Coal*, under the direction of Canadian Supreme Court Chief Justice Ivan Rand, signaled the impending death of coal mining and concluded that a region whose economy depended solely on one or two industries faced an extremely unstable economic environment that was liable to seriously hinder future development and prosperity. As the commission made clear, a single extractive industry, by its nature, was not a desirable economic base for a community. For the Sydney-Glace Bay-New Waterford industrial

83 Macdonald to Howe, 18 March 1946, MG 2, vol. 897, folder 18C/5, NSARM.

84 Howe to Macdonald, 4 April 1946, MG 2, vol. 897, folder 18C/7, NSARM.

85 E.R. Forbes, “Consolidating Disparity: The Maritimes and the Industrialization of Canada during the Second World War,” *Acadiensis* XV, no. 2 (Spring 1986), 3-27.

area, alternative economic and cultural activities had to be developed to introduce new wealth into Cape Breton. The commission also called for an “elevation of mind and spirit” and encouraged citizens of the island to look towards the “natural and historical endowment as the sources of new interests [as] undoubtedly there are resources of this nature [available] for full exploitation.”⁸⁶ Specifically, it encouraged the intensive development of a tourism industry, including the reconstruction of the Fortress of Louisbourg and further development of the Cape Breton Highlands National Park and its connecting highway system (the Cabot Trail). The commission’s report also examined the conditions of the roads and highways throughout the island and, as part of the promotion of tourists into the Louisbourg area, called for assistance in conjunction with the provincial government in “completing a modern highway” to the fortress.⁸⁷ In embracing tourism, the commission followed the province in promoting Cape Breton as a Scottish haven, stating “to the Western heath of the Scottish people, from many parts of North America and to a lesser extent, from Scotland, would come not only men and women seeking pleasant scenes and enjoyable pursuits, but haunted by intimations of ancient northern music, there to catch fleeting recognition of voices of ages past, sought and welcomed as a relief from the weight and humdrum of ordinary existence. It is a unique land, a fit place for such a national purpose.”⁸⁸

In May 1966 yet another royal commission addressing the fate of the coal industry, this one chaired by J.R. Donald and occasioned by the announcement that Dominion Coal was threatening to close down its mines in Cape Breton, tabled a report that once again examined “the dependence of the Cape Breton economy, and to a lesser extent, that of Nova Scotia, on the coal mining industry and the costs to the federal government of sustaining these operations.” Entitled *The Problem of Coal Mining in Cape Breton*, the report reiterated Rand’s findings concerning the volatile economic situation on the island. Donald also reaffirmed the conclusion of Rand a few years earlier that the federal government should cut off the flow of subsidies and assistance to the coal industry. Without federal government assistance, the commission noted, “the market for Nova Scotia coal would have been cut in half. Such a drastic reduction in markets and, hence, in output – if it had occurred – would have pushed the operating cost per ton for the remaining output to such high levels that it is doubtful if any of the Dosco mines could have continued in operation. Although the costly provision of oil equalization assistance enabled the Dosco mines to continue operations, it only postponed the Company’s arrival at its present critical position.” While the industry still employed 7,500 people, it did so only by relying on a \$22,000,000 annual subsidy from the federal government. Nevertheless, combined, the coal and steel industries employed a total of 10,500 people and provided a livelihood for over one-third of wage earners in industrial Cape Breton. Donald’s report confirmed the industry’s status as one of Canada’s leading economic “problems” and argued that alternative industries must be developed in anticipation of the maximum of 15 years left to the coal industry in Cape Breton. The impending failure of the coal industry would have deep implications for area residents. Diversification and expansion of Cape Breton’s economic base was crucial to social and cultural survival,

86 Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on Coal* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printers, 1960), 46.

87 Terry MacLean, *Louisbourg Heritage: From Ruins to Reconstruction* (Sydney: University College of Cape Breton Press, 1995), 19-23.

88 Canada, *Royal Commission on Coal*, 48.

and the end result of continued reliance on this industry would undoubtedly be to force extensive out-migration in search of employment elsewhere. The far-reaching implications were not lost on Donald: "It is ethically wrong and economically unsound to be introducing young people into the mining force where there is no assurance of future employment, where operations are basically unprofitable, and where no skills useful in other fields except mining are required."⁸⁹ Despite Donald's and Rand's dire predictions for the Cape Breton economy, however, the coal and steel industries would continue to be subsidized by the federal and provincial governments, helped along through nationalization and the establishment of the Cape Breton Development Corporation (DEVCO).

Throughout the 1960s, the economic development of Atlantic Canada would center on both the expansion of the tourism industry and "politically generated policies, institutions and programs" aimed at attracting industry into the region. Government fact-finding initiatives such as royal commissions and the reliance of industry development on regional organizations, such as the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council (APEC) and the Atlantic Development Board (ADB), serve as examples of government support for economic and industrial development in the region.⁹⁰ As an underdeveloped area in Atlantic Canada, Cape Breton's experience helps explain the dependence that parts of the region have maintained, whether this has been based on federal government monies and programs or the tourist dollar. Although tourism worked to promote alternative economic development in the rural regions of Cape Breton, such as Baddeck, Ingonish, and Cheticamp, outside of the traditional industrial area of the Sydney-Glace Bay-New Waterford the island never succeeded in diversifying its industrial economy (with the exception of Stora in the Strait of Canso).

The Canso Causeway represented an important turning point in the history of Cape Breton. Whatever its broad ecological consequences, it has profoundly impacted those communities bordering on the Strait of Canso area, virtually redrawing networks of economic and social connections. Interestingly enough, one of its immediate consequences might have been to challenge the very tradition-bound Scottish culture that its opening seemed to celebrate. Within a few years of the causeway's opening, concern would be expressed over the cohesiveness and sustainability of that culture with the accusation that there was a dearth of fiddlers to carry on the musical traditions of the island. However, it is arguable that the extensive developments in the strait area in the late 1970s and during the 1980s provided the disposable income and support for the broad re-awakening of interest in that Scottish heritage. This interest in Scottish culture, though, was not apparent during the two decades following the opening of the

89 J.R. Donald, *The Cape Breton Coal Problem* (Ottawa: Queen's Printers, May 1966), 1, 2-4, 5-6, 19, 34.

90 See Stanley, "The 1960s: The Illusions and Realities of Progress," in Forbes and Muise, *Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, 422-30, and Rick Williams, "The World is in Chaos: The Future Looks Bright," in Ian McKay and Scott Milson, eds., *Towards a New Maritimes* (Charlottetown: Ragweed Press, 1992), 362-7. See also Bickerton, *Nova Scotia, Ottawa and the Politics of Regional Development*, especially 144-6, 162-3, 179-88. A web site, the *Strait of Canso Virtual Library Project*, lists over 600 studies that have included aspects of the strait area economy, society, ecology, etc. undertaken by or on behalf of various government agencies over the past several decades. It is easily the most studied area in the Atlantic region. See <http://www.straitofcansostudies.ca/index.htm> (accessed 24 March 2007).

causeway. It has only been since the mid-1970s that the Scottish cultural “revival” has taken root in that area and many of its most prominent players were from families connected to employment in the pulp mill or associated industries.⁹¹

Systematic substitution of tourist attractions for heavy industry in Cape Breton was initially implemented by the federal rather than the provincial government. The Cape Breton Development Corporation has proven to be one of the most active and sustained economic development agencies in the country. Initially created as the agency to shut down the coal industry, the corporation ended up with a much more proactive role in developing infrastructure projects, including a wide variety of loan-assistance and grant programs – many of which resulted in an infusion of money into historical and cultural destinations. While some of these attractions, such as the Highland Village at Iona, would end up being specifically Scottish-oriented, many of them did not – such as the Fortress of Louisbourg and the Alexander Graham Bell Museum. In the strait area, DEVCO’s activities mostly supported infrastructure development. The Cape Breton side of the strait became a “growth centre,” with the pulp mill, a heavy water plant, an oil refinery, and the coal-fired Nova Scotia Power Corporation generating station. These were complemented with a number of educational institutions featuring outside investment, such as the Nova Scotia Community College Strait Area Campus, the federally funded Nautical Institute for training of seamen and pilots, and one of the largest secondary schools in the province. The industrial area surrounding Port Hawksbury, which spans the edges of Inverness and Richmond counties, has been the subject of an intense planning process by the provincial and federal governments and the recipient of large grants from the federal government for various implementation projects, including those for water, sewerage, and power infrastructure. In the end, development remained somewhat stilted as the much-promised economic boom following the causeway’s opening did not transpire. However, a new growth centre for the island was born, with the construction of the Canso Causeway and its resultant deep-water port attracting both educational and industrial complexes.

The Canso Causeway embodied dual objectives: it was to be both an integral component in modernizing Cape Breton’s coal and steel industries and the symbolic gateway for tourists into Cape Breton. Cape Bretoners have continued to wander North America in search of work, so the causeway has entered into their mythic voices as a mnemonic of their passages to and from the island.⁹² It is well represented in song, verse, and in literature as well as in the collective memory of the people who see it as an essential link to their pasts and futures. The persistence of Cape Breton’s Scottishness, as a primary signifier of its identity, is more troublesome to understand. In tourist literature associated with the province’s “tartanizing,” as well as in the allusions surrounding the inauguration of the causeway, Scottishness was presented as a static culture, frozen in time, and ripe for visitors seeking an antimodern experience. At the same time a considerable amount of economic and institutional growth occurred, with consequent opportunities for employment. Despite eventual collapse of the coal and steel centres, there was considerably more disposable income in the area surrounding the Strait of Canso and

91 Marie Thompson, “The Myth of the Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler: The Role of a CBC Film in the Cape Breton Fiddle Revival,” *Acadiensis* XXXV, no. 2 (Spring 2006), 5-26 (particularly 18).

92 Hunter and Corbin, “Built for Going Away.”

stretching up along the west coast of the island. Following a period of adjusting to the new realities, and a considerable amount of return migration to these growing areas, a rebirth of the expressive components of the Scottish traditions emerged by the 1980s. Scottish fiddle culture became focused on the strait area. By the 1990s a new wave of Celtic music associated with groups such as the Rankin Family and the Barra MacNeils was being exported round the world and visitors to Cape Breton Island now came to both experience and participate in Celtic culture through fiddling, piping, and Gaelic lessons offered at such venues as St. Anne's College or the Highland Village at Iona. The new Celtic Music Centre at Judique offers lessons in performance year-round and also contains a fully operational archives and collection of all Celtic music from Cape Breton.

Since the causeway's opening, Cape Breton's economy has become more reliant on the tourism industry than ever before, reputedly to be currently worth more than a billion dollars in economic impact per year. Developments in Nova Scotia's offshore oil and gas industry have also had an important impact on the province, but in Cape Breton this has been mostly restricted to the Strait of Canso area and its future has yet to be determined.

Where does the Canso Causeway fit into this picture? It certainly helped modernize Cape Breton Island's transportation system, both to and from the island and eventually throughout the island with the various highway improvements that were subsequently undertaken. Facilitating some industrial growth, the causeway has mostly made the island accessible to tourism and encouraged a massive expansion of that industry. Celebration of the causeway's completion marked a transition in the area as well as across the province. It was, to some extent, the culmination of the process of "tartanizing" of the province that Ian McKay has described. But it did not immediately signal a rebirth or extension of the Scottish preoccupations of the Angus L. Macdonald era. Once the sound of the bagpipes had faded, the concerns of many people around the Strait of Canso turned to the area's potential for industrial development. And as a major post-war reconstruction project, the causeway reflected the evolution of the federal government, which was both assuming a more interventionist role in regional planning and displaying an increased determination to knit together Canada's disparate parts no matter what the physical obstacles.