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Health, Social Service, and Statecraft across the Transatlantic North

Expanding the Frameworks for Atlantic Canadian History

Sasha Mullally

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FORUM

Health, Social Service, and Statecraft across the Transatlantic North: Expanding the Frameworks for Atlantic Canadian History

AT LEAST 24 VOLVOS REST AT THE BOTTOM OF BEDFORD BASIN, part of Halifax Harbour, where they landed after a shipping accident in 1969.[1] Cars crossing the MacKay Bridge, and tankers and other sea vessels moving up and down the harbour, regularly pass over this buried evidence of Volvo's first and only branch plant established outside the country of Sweden. The submerged vehicles might be seen as a metaphor – not just for lost economic opportunity, but also as a remnant of an important connection between Canada and Sweden that now lies buried and forgotten underwater. In the late summer of 2019, 15 researchers from Atlantic Canada and Western Sweden convened at the University of New Brunswick to explore various components of our two regions' histories. After a long weekend of deliberations, we found many fruitful points of comparison and contrast, started new conversations, and expanded research networks that apply David Armitage's transatlantic history framework to our specific regions within the North Atlantic.[2] This forum offers an early sample of the many papers forthcoming: works that explore themes of settlement, migration, and knowledge circulation, as well as the institutionalization, innovation, and reform of health care, education, and civic structures. Three essays offer an entry point into what we hope will be new comparative, transnational frameworks for regional history across a geographic framework we are calling the "transatlantic north."

1 "Mystery of the Sunken Volvos," *CTV News Atlantic*, https://atlantic.ctvnews.ca/video?clipId=1650951.

2 David Armitage, "Three Concepts of Atlantic History," in *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, ed. David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 11-27.

Sasha Mullally, "Health, Social Service, and Statecraft across the Transatlantic North: Expanding the Frameworks for Atlantic Canadian History," *Acadiensis* 49, no. 2 (Autumn/automne 2020): 155-158.

Sasha Mullally's essay opens the forum by investigating the early 20th century transatlantic circulation of *slöjd*, a holistic form of manual training. In "Swedish Manual Training: The Macdonald Sloyd Fund and Education Reform in the Maritimes, 1903-1917," she revisits the history of the Macdonald schools, institutions funded by tobacco importer and manufacturer William C. Macdonald, which are historically well-known as the first attempts to consolidate primary education in each of the three Maritime provinces. As Mullally explains, they were also sites of curriculum experimentation aimed at expanding the reach of public schooling. Swedish *slöjd* (anglicized as sloyd) inspired the manual training taught at the schools, a system rooted in Nordic understandings of integrated mind-body-spirit health and personal formation. Sloyd saw enthusiastic adoption in England and Scotland at the beginning of the 20th century, especially the urban schools of the large industrial cities. James W. Robertson, both a collaborator with and employee of Macdonald, was drawn to the Swedish program and its emphasis on "skill, sagacity and moral formation." A version of it, he hoped, would improve primary schooling, and primary school attendance, among rural farm boys across Canada. Crossing the Atlantic, however, the system lost the emphasis on mind-body health in favour of practical pre-vocational skills. Mining Robertson's personal papers and published works, Mullally explores the complex web of influences on Maritime education before the First World War that reveals the Nordic roots of manual training in the region. At the same time, she documents some of the ways it was subsumed by liberal vocationalism in the late-Victorian elementary education system.

The forum continues with John R. Matchim's "Towards a 'Total Welfare' Approach: Duncan Neuhauser, the International Grenfell Association, and Rural-Remote Health Care in Labrador and Swedish Lappland, 1950s-1970s." This essay examines the ways northern and Nordic spaces and peoples became sites of interest and expansion of the modern public health system. Comparing and contrasting services in Labrador and northern Sweden, a well-known American health management analyst, Duncan Neuhauser, saw much that both jurisdictions could learn from the other. The government of Newfoundland could take, for instance, a policy page from Sweden when setting up health services for the rapidly expanding mining areas of Labrador. Swedish state-sponsored health care was decidedly superior, according to Neuhauser, when compared to the corporate-sponsored care that came and went in Labrador, as impermanent as a given company's mining investment. The Swedes, for their

part, seemed to appreciate the "total welfare" approach of the International Grenfell Association (IGA) and their medical missionary work with the Labrador Innu and Inuit. The Swedes "were particularly impressed with the wide range of social and economic activities" of the Mission, which included travelling health care but also distributed sites of sponsored economic activity such as handicraft industries. By carefully contextualizing Neuhauser's contributions to the IGA circular *Among the Deep Sea Fishers,* and situating the American doctor's thoughts within broader northern health challenges for and discourses about two Arctic jurisdictions, we see how the project of modernity drew regions with similar climates, comparable populations, and economic ambitions into a comparative framework across the transatlantic north.

Examining the problem of modernization is also central to Bliss White's essay "Bringing the Commune to Canada: A Technocrat's Swedish Study Tour and the New Brunswick Program of Equal Opportunity." White revisits the history of this Program of Equal Opportunity (PEO) through a new Nordic lens. A period inaugurated by Louis J. Robichaud's ambitious and wide-ranging program to reform education, the civil service, bring in formal bilingualism, and modernize the economy and society of the province, it marked an apogee for high modernist, technocratic interventions. Yet, as White explains, the "low modernist" approaches of the interwar period did not disappear. Tracing the 1963 Swedish study tour undertaken by Alexandre Boudreau, a professor and administrator at the Université de Moncton, this contribution adds Boudreau's observations on Swedish public policy as a "useful artifact from the era of Equal Opportunity." The recommendations, though not widely read at the time, "sought to temper the high modernist approaches to government reform," according to White. Within New Brunswick's technocratic class, there were those, like Boudreau, who waxed enthusiastic about the possibilities for collectivist advancement of society through grassroots administration of the various apparati that constitute of a modern state. The historical conversation about New Brunswick's PEO suddenly becomes more complicated.

These points of comparison and contrast allow historians to see the past from new angles and reveal previously hidden or forgotten elements of the Atlantic Canadian historical landscape, already and rightly critiqued for anglo-centrism and a failure to engage with Indigenous history.[3] As recent

3 Historians have critiqued gaps in this literature, such as its US-centrism and weak engagement with Indigenous histories. See John Reid, H.V. Bowen, and Elizabeth Mancke, "Is there a 'Canadian' Atlantic World?" *International Journal of Maritime History* 21, no. 1 (June 2009): 263-95. For a recent challenge to re-centre Atlantic World history on

historiography on the "Black Atlantic" illustrates, applying intersectional methodologies from cultural studies, social history, and the social sciences can reveal distinct transatlantic cultures that otherwise get subsumed under more dominant imperial themes and connections.[4] It will also help bring questions of transatlantic comparative history from a historiographical focus on the 18th century into more contemporary scholarship.[5] Perhaps, like the Volvos at the bottom of the Bedford Basin, these explorations reveal moments where structures and goals of public policy and economic organization across the transatlantic north diverged in important ways, or even literally failed and sank. And yet, in the search for equal opportunity, as with the search for accessible public health and transformative pedagogy, valuable lessons continue to be exchanged across the shared region of the transatlantic north, where the liberal order framework came into contact and sometimes conflict with the social democratic Nordic model.[6] While not as well established in our regional historical literature as Canada-US transborder analyses or "Atlantic World" triangulations, they remain compelling and, with a change in climate, may rise to the surface once again.

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Indigenous histories, see Matthew R. Bahar, "People of the Dawn, People of the Door: Indian Pirates and the Violent Theft of the Atlantic World," *Journal of American History* 101, no. 2 (September 2014): 401–26 and John Reid, "How Wide is the Atlantic Ocean? Not Wide Enough!" *Acadiensis* 34, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 81–7.

4 See, for instance, Paul Gilroy's influential work on US history and the African Diaspora – *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

5 While historians like Jerry Bannister are right to caution historians against losing nuanced understandings of provincial and regional difference in any new enthusiasm for international comparison, modern "Nordic models" of health care, education, and social services during the 20th century offer compelling case studies against which the various Atlantic Canadian projects of provincial modernization and welfare state organization can be compared. See Jerry Bannister, "Atlantic Canada in an Atlantic World? Northeastern North America in the Long 18th century," *Acadiensis* 43, no. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2014): 3–30.

6 These two concepts, dominant during most of the 20th century in Canada and Sweden (and the other Nordic countries), are articulated and historically situated by Ian MacKay, "The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History," *Canadian Historical Review* 81, no. 4 (December 2000): 616–45 and Nik Brandal, Øivind Bratberg, and Dag Thorsen, T*he Nordic Model of Social Democracy* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), especially "Planning the Welfare State," 54–73.