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On Fertile Ground: Locating Historic Sites in the Landscapes of Fundy and the Foothills

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[See table of contents](#)

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Article abstract

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Abstract

Since the 1972 National Museums Policy announced its goals of “democratization and decentralization,” national historic sites have been marked by a trend toward regionalization. While scholars have focused on the nationalizing impetus of twentieth-century historiography before 1970, subsequently there have been consistent efforts to incorporate local environmental and cultural diversity into the “family” of national sites. This paper demonstrates this system-wide trend by comparing historic sites in the Bay of Fundy and the Alberta foothills. In both places, designation has evolved from the two-nations narrative of French-English rivalry, in seventeenth-century forts or fur trade posts which could integrate far-flung localities, thereby claiming transcontinental space as national territory. Interpretation now credits local ecological factors with shaping the course of historical events, and acknowledges in situ resources. In addition, Parks Canada has involved groups such as the Acadians or the Blackfoot, whose claims of “homeland” jostle the naturalized Canadian boundaries affirmed by the older national narrative. There are other complications, raised by revisions in public history; notably, these sites continue to play a role in the marketing of place – in a long tradition of using the landscape as an entrée to tourism – and they are not yet conceived in regional groupings.

Résumé

Depuis 1972, alors que la Politique nationale des musées annonce ses objectifs « de démocratisation et de décentralisation », les lieux historiques nationaux sont marqués par une tendance vers la régionalisation. Dès lors, grâce à des

I am grateful to the Killam Foundation for postdoctoral funding, and to the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Dalhousie University for a Research and Development Grant. These afforded visits to the sites mentioned in this paper: Bar U Ranch, Rocky Mountain House, Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, and Stirling in Alberta; Batoche, Saskatchewan; Fort Anne/Scots Fort, Port Royal Habitation, Grand Pré, Fort Edward, and Melanson Settlement in Nova Scotia. I would like to thank the Editorial Board of the *Journal* and the anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions.

efforts soutenus pour intégrer la diversité environnementale et culturelle dans la « famille » des lieux nationaux, l'historiographie nationaliste cède la place. Cet article démontre l'existence de cette tendance à l'échelle du système en comparant les lieux historiques de la baie de Fundy et ceux des contreforts de l'Alberta. Aux deux endroits, le processus de désignation et d'interprétation des forts du XVII^e siècle et des postes de traite des fourrures s'est éloigné de la trame de l'histoire des deux nations et du thème de la rivalité entre Français et Anglais, d'une approche qui avait pu inclure de vastes localités et constituer un espace transcontinental en un territoire national. L'interprétation reconnaît maintenant l'influence formatrice des facteurs locaux dans le cours des événements historiques, et elle rend justice aux ressources des lieux. En plus, Parcs Canada fait participer des groupes tels les Acadiens ou les Pieds-Noirs dont les revendications liées à leur terre d'origine bousculent les frontières canadiennes naturalisées et confirmées par l'ancien récit national. Ces révisions de l'histoire appliquée soulèvent d'autres complications; par exemple, ces lieux continuent à jouer un rôle dans la promotion de l'endroit – dans une longue tradition qui consiste à utiliser le paysage comme porte d'entrée au tourisme – et ils ne sont pas encore organisés en groupements régionaux.

In March of 1972, Gérard Pelletier, the Secretary of State, announced a new National Museums Policy, based on the twin principles of “democratization and decentralization.”¹ The policy was designed to recognize regional cultural differences on the one hand, and guarantee universal access to the nation’s cultural resources on the other. Since that time the designation and interpretation of historic sites has been increasingly tuned to local interests: a decision that has proven to be both politically and academically shrewd. Through the 1970s and 1980s, provincial governments became more assertive, and historians set about deconstructing the national narrative so carefully constructed a generation before. But the shift to decentralization dramatically affected the way historic sites use their immediate environment, an aspect of regionalization that has not been studied in any systematic way. The literature on commemoration has focused on the consolidating and nationalist agendas of the federal agencies, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC) and the Parks Branch of the federal government (hereafter Parks Canada). We know little about countervailing forces that resisted attempts at national hegemony (in this case, environmental diversity and ethnic narratives), or the relationship between federal and provincial designations. And while regional history has

1 Gérard Pelletier, Secretary of State, National Museums Policy, 1972, announced to the Canadian Club of Calgary, 28 March 1972.

ON FERTILE GROUND: LOCATING HISTORIC SITES IN THE LANDSCAPES
OF FUNDY AND THE FOOTHILLS

flourished in the Maritimes and the West — former “hinterlands” both — there has been little in the way of comparative analysis between them.

As a result, I want to attempt something that is geographically ambitious but, I think, both feasible and necessary. By evaluating changes in the selection and interpretation of historic sites by the federal government in east and west, we can see a system-wide evolution in its practice of public history in the late twentieth century. There are two areas of Canada which seem tailor-made for such a comparative analysis: the Bay of Fundy and the eastern foothills of the Rocky Mountains. At first glance, one might think such a comparison a bit far-fetched. After all, the sites clearly cluster into different historical periods, and evoke different historical images. Around the Bay of Fundy, eighteenth-century forts commemorate a hotly contested colonial battleground: Fort Anne (and the earlier Scots Fort), Fort Edward, Fort Beauséjour and Fort Gaspereaux, built (and repeatedly taken, and rebuilt) by French and English armies in the long-running imperial wars before the Conquest; Grand Pré and Melanson Settlement, the ramification of this conflict for the Acadians in the *grand dérangement*; even Port Royal Habitation, where France tried to take colonial root on the North American mainland. In the foothills, on the other hand, sites span six thousand years of human habitation: from Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, to fur trade rivalry and European exploration at Rocky Mountain House, to the newest addition, Bar U Ranch, celebrating its tenth anniversary in 2006, as a marker of nineteenth-century ranching. Here, the common element is a thematic one, for all relate in some way to the use of the natural landscape.

Why, then, this comparison? Because they are not as different as they might seem. As Acadian writer Clive Doucet points out, the *grand prés* of Fundy were so-named as being “an area so extensive, that, once dyked, it had the sweep of a prairie landscape.”² Both regions boast unusually rich *in situ* resources, resources bequeathed to us from historical patterns and events shaped as much by geophysical as by political boundaries. Although emphasizing the physical qualities of regions is to some extent a historiographical leap backwards, these physical qualities remain “the foundation of [regional] stereotypes in Canadian popular thought” and, as such, they continue to warrant academic scrutiny. Indeed, studying the historical commemoration of regions — what is selected, and why — reveals one way in which their naturalized, essentialist identities

2 Clive Doucet, *Notes from Exile: On Being Acadian* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1999), 145. The geographical boundary of the prairie is usually synonymous with Palliser’s Triangle, angling north from the Red River Valley to central Alberta, containing the southern parts of the three “prairie” provinces. This is also the northern section of the continental Great Plains. Contrary to popular perception, the prairie is not universally flat nor exclusively grassland; according to the Canadian Forest Service, the foothills belong to the prairie ecozone. The physical similarities of the Fundy shore (or the *grand pré*) and the foothills hinge on their spaciousness — whether openness to the sea or to the interior.

have been constructed. A historical dimension adds enormously to our understanding of the concept of place as “the personality of location.”³

More to the point, sites in Alberta and Nova Scotia show remarkable similarities in the ways in which they have been managed — and the changes in that management in the past 35 years. I think it is important (and overdue) to recognize the dramatically different historiography applied at these places in the 1970s and 1980s, as Parks Canada adapted the national narrative that it presented to a public audience by incorporating local ecological and cultural elements. Both Fundy and the foothills wear the same layers of designation: an underlying foundation of the “two nations” vision of Canadian history, which dominated academic circles for much of the twentieth century, and subsequent corrections and alterations amid the enthusiasm for the “limited identities” of region, ethnicity, and class after 1970. This article, then, will first explore the traditional functions of these historic sites, as expressions of a unifying national narrative and as recreational spaces. Here the emphasis was on the story of nation-building to which they belonged, and the political project to which they contributed, rather than their differences or distinctiveness. Then, I examine efforts by a later generation of Parks historians to ground that story in local settings. They have incorporated, with varying degrees of success, aspects of the natural environment, aboriginal and minority histories, and regional agendas and identities. Management plans from the 1980s and 1990s give a clear sense of public historians attempting to bring recent historiography into the public realm. Though commendable, this is not without its concerns, for historic sites are now more politically engaged, more potentially controversial, than the national narrative is supposed to be. And in a world where *Maclean's* magazine characterizes even the phrase “cultural narrative” as “academic-speak,” making recent historiography accessible is no mean feat.⁴

The Politics of Commemoration

Commemoration has proven to be a rich and colourful subject for research in the past decade. Scholars have asked who has authored history, and why the state chooses to become involved; what is selected and omitted, for the sensitivities of the day; and how preferences in scholarly history writing are applied to contemporary political situations, to create a “usable past” — or a marketable one. This kind of work expands the concept of historiography beyond the

3 Gerald Friesen, “The Evolving Meanings of Region in Canada,” *Canadian Historical Review* 82, no. 3 (September 2001): 534; Dolores Hayden, “Urban Landscape History: The Sense of Place and the Politics of Space,” in Paul Groth and Todd Bressi, eds., *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 112. There is a particularly biting comment on the essentialist nature of regional identities by Ian McKay in “A Note on ‘Region’ in Writing the History of Atlantic Canada,” *Acadiensis* 29, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 89–101.

4 “When literature could still shock,” *Maclean's* (1 January 2007): 42.

ON FERTILE GROUND: LOCATING HISTORIC SITES IN THE LANDSCAPES
OF FUNDY AND THE FOOTHILLS

intellectual evolution of the discipline, to consider its context and application, and the range of actors who assume and wield historical authority. It not only challenges the traditional objectivity of the academic, it also highlights the presence of history in popular culture and its role in shaping group identities. There is growing interest in Canada and elsewhere about how historical tradition is invented to cultivate national identity, to shore up a common narrative and thereby legitimize the nation-state. Benedict Anderson discussed how the museum operated as a tool of the colonial state; I would suggest that historic sites fill much the same function in the post-colonial period.⁵ While historians have been drawn to commemoration in public ritual and social processes, cultural geographers have been invaluable in analyzing the use and design of landscapes as public space.⁶ But both groups examine the construction of a singular historical memory, emphasizing that the sanctioned or inherited memory is but one version of events retained; the function of that memory as a cohesive force, usually at the national level and especially in pluralist societies where such a cohesive force is required; and most important for our purposes, the location or association of that memory in certain symbolic places.

Within this new literature on commemoration, the only full-length study of Canadian historic sites remains C.J. Taylor's *Negotiating the Past: The mak-*

5 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 178-85. Historic site designation would appear to be one expression of what Frances Kaye calls a mature "settler culture": "A settler culture begins to be post-colonial when it claims to be different from, not the same as, its metropolitan culture." Frances Kaye, *Hiding the Audience: Viewing Arts and Arts Institutions on the Prairies* (Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press, 2003), 15-16. Establishing a national narrative that incorporated both imperial tradition and new North American material seems to fit this characterization.

6 Historical and cultural geographers have always viewed landscape as a synthetic or man-made space, and thus have been particularly adept at reading historical practices in places. Brian Osborne, Denis Cosgrove, and Graeme Wynn have been particularly prolific, with regards to Canadian national iconography, American and British landscapes, and Atlantic Canadian settlement patterns, respectively. For an introduction to the geographers' contribution, see, for example, Michael Conzen, "The Historical Impulse in Geographical Writing about the United States, 1850-1990," in Michael P. Conzen et al., *A Scholar's Guide to Geographical Writing on the American and Canadian Past* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 3-90; the essays in Paul Groth and Todd W. Bressi, eds., *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), especially Deryck W. Holdsworth, "Landscapes and Archives as Texts"; and the essays (notably those by Cosgrove and Wynn) in Alan R.H. Baker and Gideon Biger, eds., *Ideology and Landscape in Historical Perspective: Essays on the Meanings of some Places in the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). The physicality of commemoration research is demonstrated by the fact that in Canada the best work is often published by the *Material History Review*. As for historians, while some of the best known work deals with war memorials (Jonathan F. Vance, *Death So Noble*, 1997), place- or site-based research has come most consistently from public historians working for Parks Canada — Christina Cameron, David Neufeld, Robert Coutts, Michael Payne, and James de Jonge, among others.

ing of Canada's national historic parks and sites.⁷ As an institutional history, it emphasizes the schism between the academically-minded historians on the HSMBC and the heritage or development-oriented Parks Canada. There are decided advantages to focusing on the national sites: not only are designation records largely confined to those two agencies, simplifying research, but their ideological agendas tend to be more explicit and coherent, and until recently, national designation was considered to rank foremost in importance.⁸ There have been a few studies of provincial designations, but there are jurisdictional and methodological issues that discourage comparative analysis.⁹ Records such as management plans, commemorative integrity statements, and research papers are necessarily highly detailed, and applied to and directed at reconstruction or operation of individual sites. So there has been little in the way of systemic or comparative analysis within or across political jurisdictions among government scholarship about commemorative sites.

Provincial cultural bureaucracies exploded in the post-war period, in part because this was the moment at which governments committed to historic sites as full-scale development projects for tourism. But this tended to exacerbate differences between individual provinces, depending on their various fiscal, natural, and historical resources. Moreover, within each province responsibility for historic sites shifted between departments with frustrating regularity, again in part because of their mercurial bureaucratic identifications as "tourism," "parks," "recreation," and so forth. I would argue, however, that the provincial approach to historic sites has been consistently more utilitarian than the federal one, insofar as there is rarely a canonic definition of "provincial significance" that is as influential or consistent as the national one.¹⁰ Indeed,

7 C.J. Taylor, *Negotiating the Past: The making of Canada's national historic parks and sites* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990).

8 Records for the HSMBC are held at the National Archives under the reference number R1185-24-4-E. Records for national historic sites and parks managed by Parks Canada between 1960-1990 (the period of interest for this paper) are available as National Historic Sites, Canadian Parks Branch, R5747-17-3-F. However, background research papers, management plans, commemorative integrity statements, and other site documents authored by Parks researchers are usually held at the regional headquarters or Service Centres: for the purposes of this paper, primarily Winnipeg, for the Western Region and Halifax, for the Atlantic Region.

9 Also worth noting is Shannon Ricketts, "Cultural Selection and National Identity: Establishing Historic Sites in a National Framework, 1920-1939," *The Public Historian* 18, no. 3 (Summer 1996): 23-41. On provincial commemoration, see, for example, Paul Litt, "Pliant Clio and Immutable Texts: The Historiography of a Historical Marking Program," *The Public Historian*, 19, no. 4 (Fall 1997): 7-28; and a special issue of *Prairie Forum* 15, no. 2 (Fall 1990), featuring pieces on Manitoba and Alberta commemorations.

10 Here is an example of academic and public interests diverging: while regional history bloomed in the academy in the 1970s — thanks in large part to J.M.S. Careless' seminal article, "Limited Identities in Canada," *Canadian Historical Review* 50 (1969): 1-10 — the new bureaucratic interest in historic sites proved more pragmatic and, as a result, provincial designations never departed significantly from the traditional emphases established by the HSMBC and

ON FERTILE GROUND: LOCATING HISTORIC SITES IN THE LANDSCAPES
OF FUNDY AND THE FOOTHILLS

provincial sites usually followed the ideological or interpretative lead of their federal counterparts, and, arguably, have been even more conservative, in order to court a wider (paying) audience. As a result, I have chosen to concentrate on Parks Canada in this paper: it is the most influential agency in historic site development in the post-war period, and the one in which the new public history appears most clearly. By reading management plans for generational or historiographical change rather than for site directives, we can see evidence of changes across the board.

Parks Canada historians have been accused of sustaining “the most conservative history in Canada.”¹¹ After all, historic sites represent a state-sanctioned version of a collective story, a social order, and civic values. They are selected in order to prompt or reassure our feelings of belonging. They are specific places that we can see or imagine, and that have stories we associate with the places and with ourselves. But what critics have overlooked are the changes within the past thirty years, changes which mark a conscious and important departure from the conservative, national history associated with the grand old men sitting on the HSMBC in the middle of the century. Public historians are, after all, trained historians, simply working for a broader audience; and although constrained by pragmatic concerns such as government funding, public expectation, and artifact management, they are aware of new developments within the academy, and have sought to incorporate both recent historiography and greater sensitivity to local environmental and community identities. Public history occupies a space between popular heritage and academic history, attempting to infuse the former with more of the latter.¹²

embraced by the public. As late as 1972 Alberta's Public Advisory Committee on the Conservation of Historical and Archaeological Resources identified five major themes for commemoration: trading posts along major watercourses; missions; the opening of west circa 1880 (including forts associated with the Métis resistance); immigrant communities; trails and water routes. This did not differ substantially from the west imagined by the HSMBC or the Parks Branch for most of the century, or from the commemorative agenda of the Saskatchewan jubilee twenty years before. See Alberta Environment Conservation Authority, *Conservation of Historical and Archaeological Resources in Alberta: Report and Recommendations* (Edmonton, AB: Government of Alberta, 1972), 14; David Smith, “Celebrations and History on the Prairies,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 17, no. 3 (Fall 1982): 47-57.

11 Frits Pannekoek, “Who Matters? Public History and the Invention of the Canadian Past,” *Acadiensis* 29, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 207.

12 For an excellent and personable account of public history in relation to heritage and history, see Andrew Gulliford's “Old West, New West, Next West: Preserving Western History,” in Andrew Gulliford, ed., *Preserving Western History* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 3-10, and the other essays in this collection. David Lowenthal's *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York: Free Press, 1996) is a highly influential work, but its characterizations of heritage and history are often too dichotomous, and overlooks the efforts of public historians to “bridge the gap.”

At the same time, we need to remember that historic sites engage the public more directly than nearly any other medium. American historians are currently engaged in a lively debate as to the viability of national commemoration *vis à vis* local or vernacular history. John Gillis argues, for example, “the reality is that the nation is no longer the site or frame of memory for most people and therefore national history is no longer a proper measure of what people really know about their pasts.”¹³ Possible conflict between national agenda and local experience — or any recent adaptations *of* that national agenda *to* local experience — remains relatively unexplored in Canada, at least by academics. HSMBC and Parks Canada historians necessarily review this more frequently than their university counterparts. Roger Marsters has found an interesting case of community protest in 1930, when Nova Scotia’s Anglophone heritage community, seeking to commemorate Colonel John Noble and the Anglo-American presence at Grand Pré, opposed the HSMBC’s “top-down” (if more diplomatic, not to mention historically correct) attempt to recognize the site’s bicultural significance. The clearest opposition to the national narrative has been expressed in Quebec, although the emphasis here again is on competing versions of a “national” narrative.¹⁴ Historical imagery is deeply entrenched in Canadian culture, and attachment to iconic places, artifacts, and characters — even those that border on stereotype — should not be underestimated. Public attachment and public criticism has

13 John R. Gillis, “Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship” in Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 17. Scholars such as John E. Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) and Casey Nelson Blake, “The Usable Past, the Comfortable Past, and the Civic Past: Memory in Contemporary America,” *Cultural Anthropology* 14, no. 3 (August 1999): 423-35, remind of the political function served by a national narrative constructed in the twentieth century, and the political investment it represents; though they and others, such as Michael A. Tomlan, ed., *Preservation: Of What, For Whom? A Critical Look at Historical Significance* (Ithaca, NY: National Council for Preservation Education, 1998), concede the issues of authority and exclusion inherent in the making of that narrative. At the same time, Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) and David Glassberg, *Sense of History: the place of the past in American life* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001) suggest that collective memory is more pervasive and more sustainably cultivated in “unofficial” venues.

14 Roger Marsters, “John Clarence Webster and Bicultural Nationalism: Language, Ethnicity and the Politics of Commemoration in early Twentieth-Century Canada” (M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 2004). On “rival” commemoration in Quebec, see Patrice Groulx and Alain Roy, “Les lieux historiques de la région de Québec comme lieux d’expression identitaire, 1965-1985,” *Revue d’histoire de l’Amérique française* 48, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 527-41; also Richard Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1988), and Ronald Rudin, *Founding Fathers: The Celebration of Champlain and Laval in the Streets of Quebec, 1878-1908* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

come to bear on historic sites and museums as never before. The extreme reaction to *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920*, the National Museum of American Art's 1991 exhibit of frontier art, indicated that academic revision of mythic images can provoke extreme sentiments, given that many remain deeply attached to conventional, romantic, and nationalist ideas of the American historical landscape.¹⁵ In Canada, such attachment is evidenced by the fact that the provinces, in particular, have not significantly departed from conventional historiography. On the basis of sheer numbers, in 2006 most provincial sites still favour Northwest Mounted Police forts and fur trade posts in the west, and attractive Loyalist houses in the east. This preference demonstrates the depth of the challenge faced by public historians who wish to reinterpret national narratives.

The Traditional Characterization

With the shift toward full reconstruction in the post-war period, commemorative site development prompted extensive archaeological investigations and a new scrutiny of regional environments and geographies. While there had been some reconstructions in the 1930s, these were governed by an eclectic range of motives: amateur interest, Depression-era employment projects, or northern development. The reconstruction of Port Royal Habitation outside Annapolis Royal, for example, was very much the initiative of Harriet Taber Richardson, an American philanthropist somewhat enamoured of Samuel de Champlain.¹⁶

On the other hand, the academic rationale behind designation had been fairly consistent into the 1950s. Sites were selected to integrate far-flung

15 Some argued that the exhibit's unpopularity was due to the public preference for nostalgic, uncontroversial, untroubling pasts; others, that the fault lay with the heavy-handed academic curatorial language which "neglected the public audience" and failed to respect their "defining cultural myths." Visitors' books have provided historians with an excellent primary resource as to the public's reaction. Perhaps most astonishing, however, was the Senate Appropriations Committee weighing in on the matter — and accusing the Smithsonian of a leftist agenda. See Steven C. Dubin, *Displays of Power: Memory and Amnesia in the American Museum* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 152-85; Michael Böss, "Western Landscapes and the Politics of Culture," *American Studies in Scandinavia* 30, no. 1 (1998): 47-66; Thomas A. Woods, "Museums and the Public: Doing History Together," *Journal of American History* 82, no. 3 (December 1995): 1111-15; Roger B. Stein, "Visualizing Conflict in The West as America," *The Public Historian* 14, no. 3 (Fall 1992): 85-91.

16 On Port Royal, see W.P. Kerr, *Port-Royal Habitation: The Story of the French and Mi'kmaq at Port-Royal, 1604-13* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 2005). The government of Manitoba also began a partial restoration of Prince of Wales' Fort in the mid-1930s, hoping that it would attract tourists along the newly-completed railway to Churchill and provide a new form of income to the old fur trade territory. Significantly, this idea was revived in the early 1970s, when site development was both fashionable and well-funded, and "underdeveloped" regions a cause for concern. Taylor, *Negotiating the Past*, 108-9 and 116-7; Provincial Archives of Manitoba, File E7.5, Box E 10 6 18, "Churchill Interpretative/ Accommodation Facility.

localities, thereby claiming transcontinental space as imperial or national territory.¹⁷ Landscape was a strategic possession and yet an abstract concept. The HSMBC's philosophy was rooted in nationalist traditions of the nineteenth century, in which nation-states sought to legitimize territorial claims by locating their national narratives within those territories.¹⁸ In Canada, the Board was guided by a national history usually credited to a group of scholars known as the "Laurentian School." Historians such as Harold Innis and Donald Creighton argued that continental geography, which rested (literally) on the Canadian (or Laurentian) Shield, had guided or framed the evolution of modern Canada. This expansive geological foundation, they thought, demonstrated a natural and historical coherence. Innis emphasized the technologies used to penetrate the continent and to export successive natural resources, or "staples"; Creighton, the rise of a commercial empire based in the St. Lawrence valley. A national political union thus had emerged "naturally" from economic patterns in turn derived from geography.

This interpretation smoothly incorporated the two major imperial eras by emphasizing the similarities between French and English occupation, and legitimized the transfer of European governance to Central Canada.¹⁹ The emphasis was on a singular national experience with the interior, so the differences *within* that interior were muted to a hinterland sameness. At Sainte-Marie-Among-the-Hurons, for example, the French and Catholic qualities of the seventeenth-century Jesuit mission were muted so the site could represent the birth of European civilization in the wilderness, and thus be acceptable to a wider demographic in post-war Ontario.²⁰ This attitude was reinforced by the arts, too, where artists like the Group of Seven and "Laurentian" poets like Douglas LePan nationalized and romanticized the Shield country in much the same fashion. The idea of a vast, unknown, potentially hostile wilderness also lent itself best to the style of writing in this period, which favoured heroic biography and dramatic storytelling.²¹

17 M. B. Payne and C.J. Taylor, "Western Canadian Fur Trade Sites and the Iconography of Public Memory," *Manitoba History* 46 (Winter 2003-2004): 2-14. John Warkentin indicates that *actual* knowledge of the Maritimes and the West in the late nineteenth century was as much creatively hopeful rhetoric as informed opinion, see "Geography of Confederation" (Toronto: Department of Geography, York University, 2004), 8, 19.

18 Eric Kaufmann, "'Naturalizing the Nation': the Rise of Naturalistic Nationalism in the United States and Canada," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40, no. 4 (October 1998): 666-95.

19 See Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing Since 1900*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986).

20 Alan Gordon, "Heritage and Authenticity: The Case of Ontario's Sainte-Marie-Among-the-Hurons," *Canadian Historical Review* 85, no.3 (September 2004): 516-7.

21 See Ryan Edwardson, "Narrating a Canadian Identity: Arthur R.M. Lower's *Colony to Nation* and the Nationalization of History," *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 26 (Fall 2002): 59-75.

ON FERTILE GROUND: LOCATING HISTORIC SITES IN THE LANDSCAPES
OF FUNDY AND THE FOOTHILLS

Emphasizing imperial battles, continental exploration, and routes of trade resulted in a system of historic sites designed to explain the origins of Canada's borders and a transcontinental "dominion of the north." The earliest selections around Fundy and along the Rockies were characteristic of the Board's preferences. In 1920 alone the HSMBC designated Fort Beauséjour, Fort Gaspereaux, Fort Anne, and Fort Edward, followed by Port Royal in 1923. The French-English dynamic, although antagonistic in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, suited the two-nations-but-ultimately-English Canadian narrative of the twentieth. But it also minimized any local detail. The Maritimes were preserved as a microcosm of imperial contest, but the language of designation was one of regimental movements and imperial gains, not of place. Consider a sample of the 1924 text commemorating Fort Beauséjour:

Fort Beauséjour, built by order of Marquis de la Jonquière, Governor of Canada, 1750-51. Taken by Lt. Col. Robert Monckton with volunteers from New England, known as Shirley's Regiment. Raised by Lt. Col. John Winslow, aided by men of the Royal Artillery and other British troops, after a long siege, lasting from 3rd June to 16th June, 1755 ...²²

Interestingly, however, Gerald Friesen suggests that the first sign of regional identities emerges in this period of war between empires, when territoriality and boundaries between settlements became politically significant.²³

In Alberta, the HSMBC first opted for Jasper House in 1924, then Henry House and Rocky Mountain House in 1926. These fur trade sites marked the progress of the rival Northwest Company and the Hudson's Bay Company, as they leapfrogged along rivers to the Pacific; at Rocky Mountain House, the competition is evident in *four* adjacent fort sites. With the HSMBC's national sanction, corporate rivalry was transmuted into a kind of unconscious, cooperative nation-building. This suited perfectly the tenor of mid-twentieth-century Canadian nationalism: a conciliatory gesture that incorporated a French presence (usually with the colourful *voyageurs* of the fur trade) in a way safely distant from any twentieth-century politics, while keeping the emphasis on Canada's mastery of continental space. Anchored in Central Canada, this story showcased Eastern initiative and the implementation of Anglo-Canadian institutions, foreshadowing later nation-building achievements such as the "National Dream" of a transcontinental railroad. This centralizing theme was in part because Canadian history was in the throes of the Laurentian thesis, but this historical narrative was also a useful, if largely symbolic, means by which to maintain a federal presence in the west at a time when economic policy and

22 Minutes of HSMBC, 1924, cited in *Fort Beauséjour and Fort Gaspereaux National Historic Sites Management Plan* (Hull, Quebec: Parks Canada, 1997), 9-10.

23 Friesen, "The Evolving Meaning of Regions in Canada," 531.

natural resources were increasingly contested between Ottawa and the provincial governments.²⁴

The result was a complementary and linear periodization, assigning the Maritimes and the prairies roughly sequential chapters to form a plausible national story: eighteenth-century contests to win the continent; once secured under the British Crown, nineteenth-century exploration to possess it. Although responsible for making recommendations in different regions, and though each had particular agendas (Nova Scotia's representatives in the 1930s were particularly resolute), members of the HSMBC were not advocating *regional* historiography. All agreed on the importance of national history above regional or local histories, and on the importance of sites that explained the achievement (and defence) of "Canadian" territory.²⁵ Collapsing multiple environments and a dozen regional political entities into a coherent national narrative was seen as both historiographically necessary and a relatively benign means of political integration. The preoccupation with titanic imperial struggles and continental occupation also suggests an alternative perception of the Maritimes in mid-century Canada. While it did assume a Canadian destiny, this historical perspective gave the East a strategic importance that deserves to be placed against the condescending, pre-modern characterization of the rustic folk decried by Ian McKay.²⁶

This older narrative reinforced and profited from popular wilderness mythology. The expanse of western space provided a challenging setting against which the heroic Anglo-Canadian explorer might demonstrate his heroic endurance and ingenuity. Such are C.W. Jeffery's portraits of *David Thompson Taking an Observation* or *David Thompson in the Athabasca Pass, 1810*. As the foremost historical illustrator of the early twentieth-century, Jeffery's images were ubiquitous in textbooks, classroom prints, and corporate collections.²⁷ Nature was also used to highlight certain ethnic qualities: innate wilderness

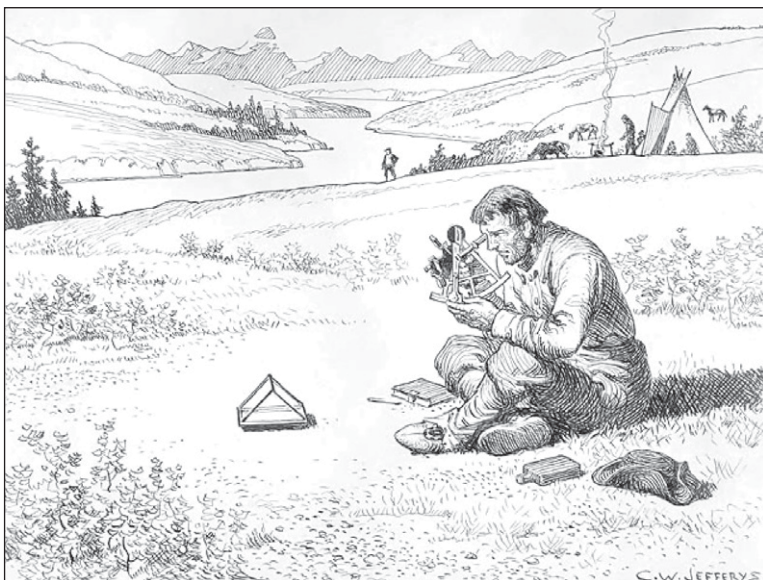
24 Canada was not unusual in its federalist use of history. The American Antiquities Act of 1906 was designed as an executive power, as the language of the Act indicates: "the President of the United States is hereby authorized, in his discretion, to declare by public proclamation historic landmarks." This was exercised primarily in the west for the initial decades of the twentieth century, and the seminal National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 subjected state heritage legislation to federal disallowal. See David Harmon, et al., eds., *The Antiquities Act* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2006), particularly David Harmon, Francis P. McManamon, and Dwight T. Pitcaithley, "The Importance of the Antiquities Act," 1-12, and Jerry L. Rogers, "The Antiquities Act and Historic Preservation," 176-86.

25 Thus, for example, the particular fascination with War of 1812 battle sites. Taylor clearly demonstrates this phenomenon in Chapters Two and Three of *Negotiating the Past*.

26 Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 1994).

27 Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), Charles William Jefferys fonds, Imperial Oil Collection series, C-073573 and C-070258; and *The picture gallery of Canadian history*, vol. 2 (Toronto: Ryerson, 1942); also M.J. H. Liversidge, "Striking 'A Native Note': C.W. Jefferys

ON FERTILE GROUND: LOCATING HISTORIC SITES IN THE LANDSCAPES
OF FUNDY AND THE FOOTHILLS



David Thompson taking an Observation, C.W. Jefferys (n.d.)



Early Acadia 1635-1755, Claude T. Picard (1986) Courtesy of Claude Picard and the Grand-Pré National Historic Site of Canada

knowledge was attributed to the *canadiens* and Mi'kmaq, to explain the success of their guerrilla raids on Forts Anne or Beauséjour, and as a factor in the diligent toil of unassuming Acadian farmers. There is still a lingering idealism in the characterization of "indigenous" residents. As Laura Peers has pointed out, the public representation of aboriginals generally has been a corrective to sites designated initially to tell a story of French-English accomplishment. Where more effort — and more funding — had already been invested in reconstructing the European fort, a native encampment can be erected quickly and cheaply outside the fort walls, but this only reinforces the visual separation of white and native, of civilized and primitive, keeping natives in a "natural" setting.²⁸ Similarly, Melanson documents do little to deconstruct a sense of an Acadian "golden age," suggesting that dykeland construction was a less destructive alternative to colonial forest clearance in the development of agricultural acreage.²⁹ Both Grand Pré's current management plan and its former director paint a pleasant image of "bountiful harvests from the fertile reclaimed land," and idyllic paintings of the cooperative community by Lewis Parker and Claude Picard are sold at the site.³⁰

The Use of Historic Space

The other "tradition" involving historic spaces has been their attraction as recreational destinations. There was a definite economic utility in preserving green space around historic artifacts. J.B. Harkin originally devised the designation of "historic park" (eventually applied to most of the sites in the two areas being considered here) to provide Eastern Canada with national park space, with the added benefit of educational historical relics and ruins.³¹ Of course, there is enormous interpretative value in using the surrounding environment for ambiance and viewsapes. It makes historical actors, historical narrative,

and Canadian Identity in Landscape Painting," *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 9, no. 1 (1994): 64-71. For a wide-ranging discussion of the wilderness myth in Canada, see Daniel Francis, *National Dreams: Myth, Memory and Canadian History* (Vancouver, B.C.: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1997).

28 Laura Peers, "'Playing Ourselves': First Nations and Native American Interpreters at Living History Sites," *Public Historian* 21, no. 4 (Fall 1999): 39-59; and Peers, "Fur Trade History, Native History, Public History: Communication and Miscommunication," in Jo-Anne Fiske, et al., eds., *New Faces of the Fur Trade: Selected Papers of the Seventh North American Fur Trade Conference* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University, 1995), 101-19.

29 *Melanson Settlement National Historic Site Management Plan* (Gatineau: Parks Canada, 2004), 15.

30 *Grand Pré National Historic Site of Canada Management Plan* (Hull, Quebec: Parks Canada, 2002) 4; Barbara LeBlanc, *Postcards from Acadie: Grand-Pré, Evangeline and the Acadian Identity* (Kentville, N.S.: Gaspereau Press, 2003). LeBlanc was the director of Grand Pré between 1988 and 1992, and president of the *Société Promotion Grand-Pré* between 1998 and 2001.

31 Taylor, *Negotiating the Past*, 28-9.

ON FERTILE GROUND: LOCATING HISTORIC SITES IN THE LANDSCAPES
OF FUNDY AND THE FOOTHILLS

and historical settings all seem more tangible and more accessible. The line of mountains from Rocky Mountain House, so familiar to those living in western Alberta, is, presumably, as David Thompson would have seen it; the relative isolation of the Bar U Ranch helps convey the feeling of spacious movement in cattle drives before homestead fencing. In the Maritimes, the same unchanging geographic conditions affect commemorative sites. For example, the view down the Annapolis River from the earthworks explains Fort Anne's strategic position.

But the most *consistent* form of land use at sites of commemoration has been as scenery for recreation, a use which does not always reflect the importance of local geography to the artifacts at the sites themselves. Fort Anne was leased to the town of Annapolis Royal by its custodial authority, the Annapolis Royal Garrison Commission in 1899, and postcards show it being used as a baseball diamond by 1910; the Windsor Golf Club won a fifty-year lease on Fort Edward from the Department of the Interior in 1924.³² The Windsor-Annapolis Railway opened its line to Grand Pré in 1869 to take advantage of tourists seeking the "remains of the beautiful village of Grand-Pré" popularized by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 1847 poem *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie*. The romance of the setting — whether as picturesque ruin, "in these green hills, aslant to the sea, no change!" as C.G.D. Roberts wrote in his poem, "Tantramar Revisited" (1887); as the ornamental gardens of the 1920s arranged by the Dominion Atlantic Railway, the major force behind Grand Pré's development after purchasing the site in 1917; or as the Apple Blossom festivals of the 1930s — muted the more violent, distasteful aspects of the historical record of the Deportation.³³ Nor is this a case of private entrepreneurship alone. In his study of national parks in Atlantic Canada, Alan MacEachern has shown that Parks Canada approached park-making with a checklist of desirable qualities, foremost among them being sublime scenery. It therefore preferred to exclude — or eject — communities that did not accord to the desired image: "It did not wish to preserve the cultural remnants of the people being expropriated," MacEachern argues, "but sought to introduce idealized versions of their culture for the amusement of tourists."³⁴ The Royal Commission

32 *Port-Royal, Fort Anne, Scots Fort and Fort Edward National Historic Sites of Canada Management Plan* (Hull: Parks Canada, 2002), 50.

33 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie* (Boston: William D. Ticknor and Co., 1847); M. Brook Taylor, "The Poetry and Prose of History: Evangeline and the Historians of Nova Scotia," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 23, no. 1-2 (Spring 1988): 46-67; Jay White, "'A Vista of Infinite Development': Surveying Nova Scotia's Early Tourism Industry," *Journal of the Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society* 6 (2003): 144-69.

34 Indeed, residents likened the appropriation of land for the creation of Cape Breton National Park to the Acadian expulsion. Alan MacEachern, *Natural selections: National parks in Atlantic Canada, 1935-1970* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 60, 71.

on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences (the Massey Commission) found it “curious” that interpreted historic sites were the responsibility of Parks Canada, but accepted that this arrangement was designed to appease “consumer interest.” Today recreational users are an acknowledged audience at the Fundy sites, with picnic tables scattered somewhat incongruously among the earthworks of Fort Anne, and the Fort Beauséjour and Melanson Settlement Management Plans note their “ideal recreational setting” and scenic value.³⁵

The West courted the gentleman traveller seeking adventure, big game hunting, and the invigorating activities of the strenuous life from the middle of the nineteenth century. Indeed, this kind of tourist was as much a fixture of the West as the explorers and ranchers he sought to emulate. In 1919 then Prince of Wales Edward Windsor (later Edward VIII), taken with the reputed romance of the old-time ranching frontier, purchased a ranch near High River. Alberta recently designated this EP (Edward Prince) Ranch a provincial historic site.³⁶ Here, too, Parks Canada simply rode and encouraged a popular demand for iconic landscapes, and infused it with a note of patriotism. At federally commemorated fur trade sites in the West, as Michael Payne and C.J. Taylor have shown, the experience of the natural landscape became equated with an “emotional rediscovery of Canada.”³⁷

The same is true at the provincial level. Alberta operates a campground next to the reconstructed missions and fur trade buildings at Dunvegan, a popular destination for its views of the Peace River — again blurring the site’s recreational and historical function. The province deliberately selected certain sites for development in order to attract tourist revenue to remote locations, admitting “the decision to proceed with the various developments was predicated in good

35 On Parks Canada, see the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences, *Report* (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1951), 123. On contemporary recreation, see *Fort Beauséjour and Fort Gaspereaux National Historic Sites Management Plan*, 22, 55 and *Melanson Settlement National Historic Site Management Plan* (2004), 28.

36 Bill Parenteau, “Angling, Hunting and the Development of Tourism in Late Nineteenth Century Canada: A Glimpse at the Documentary Record,” *Archivist* 117 (1998): 10-19; Guy Vanderhaeghe, *The Last Crossing* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2002). See also the essays in Simon Evans, Sarah Carter, Bill Yeo, eds., *Cowboys, Ranchers and the Cattle Business: Cross-Border Perspectives on Ranching History* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2000), particularly Lorain Lounsberry’s “Wild West Shows and the Canadian West,” 139-52, which discusses the marketing of a ranch heritage through the Calgary Stampede, first held in 1912. On the EP Ranch specifically, see Simon M. Evans, *Prince Charming Goes West: the story of the E.P. Ranch* (Calgary, AB: University of Calgary Press, 1993); Canadian Register of Historic Places, <http://www.historicplaces.ca/rep-reg/affichage-display_e.aspx?Id=1171>, (viewed 8 January 2007); Alberta Community Development, Heritage Resource Management Branch File: Des. 396.

37 Payne and Taylor, *Western Canadian Fur Trade Sites*, 5.

ON FERTILE GROUND: LOCATING HISTORIC SITES IN THE LANDSCAPES OF FUNDY AND THE FOOTHILLS

measure on the anticipated economic return on the investments.”³⁸ Catering to public demand is part of a larger dilemma for public historians. Our expectations of what *looks* historic, and our preferences for signature mythic landscapes, tend to perpetuate a generic quality in historic attractions.

Revision: Interpretation and the Environment

Despite the strength of tradition, there has been a decisive trend in the last three decades or so toward incorporating a more sophisticated understanding of environmental and ethnic diversity in the interpretation of historic sites. Here again we see the influence of academically-trained public historians, particularly those employed by Ottawa, whose resources for hiring full-time historians are simply greater than the provinces. These historians are more attuned to developments within the academy than they are often given credit for. Historians and geographers alike have shifted their emphasis from functional relationships with the environment to understanding the “subjective construction of places through imagination and discourse.”³⁹ And since the 1970s, the homogeneity of a national framework, geographic or historical, has been under relentless attack. Led by W.L. Morton’s criticism of the Laurentian Thesis’ dismissive attitude toward hinterlands, and energized by J.M.S. Careless’ call for tracing the evolution of “limited” rather than national identities, historians embraced a variety of regional landscapes. To borrow Cole Harris’ wonderful metaphor, the illusion of Canada as a single entity dissolved into an archipelago of disconnected islands.⁴⁰ More specifically, acknowledging the multiplicity of physical environments *within* regions has been one of the major trends in recent

38 William J. Byrne, “Finding the Funding and Other Provincial Responsibilities: The Alberta Experience,” in Thomas H.B. Symons, ed., *The Place of History: Commemorating Canada’s Past*, (Ottawa: Royal Society of Canada, 1997), 237-43; Mark Rasmussen, “The Heritage Boom: The Evolution of Historical Resource Conservation in Alberta,” *Prairie Forum* 15, no. 2 (Fall 1990): 235-62; Greg Stevens, “Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism’s response to Cultural Tourism,” in Walter Jamieson, ed., *Planning for Cultural Tourism: A Symposium* (Calgary, AB: University of Calgary Press, 1989), 75. On Dunvegan, see Provincial Museum and Archives of Alberta Report: *Dunvegan: A Proposal for the Establishment of a Historic Park* (February 1973), and Daniel Francis and Michael Payne, *A Narrative History of Fort Dunvegan* (Winnipeg: Watson and Dyer, 1993).

39 Jonathan M. Smith, Andrew Light, and David Roberts, “Philosophies and Geographies of Place,” in Light and Smith, eds., *Philosophies of Place* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1998), 2.

40 See William Morton, “Clio in Canada: The Interpretation of Canadian History,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (April 1946): 227-34; Ramsay Cook, “Canadian Centennial Celebrations,” *International Journal* 22 (Autumn 1967): 659-63; J.M.S. Careless, “Limited Identities in Canada”; Cole Harris, “The Emotional Structure of Canadian Regionalism,” The Walter L. Gordon Lecture Series 1980-81, vol. 5, *The Challenges of Canada’s Regional Diversity* (Toronto: Canada Studies Foundation, 1981), 9-30.

historiography.⁴¹ One of the objectives of the New West historians writing in the 1980s and 1990s was to expose the internal differences (geographical, environmental, and cultural) in the West that the language of the frontier tended to obscure. What is interesting is that it is *federal* sites which have adapted most quickly, and shown increasing sensitivity to regional geography. In 1984, for example, the HSMBC recognized the national historic significance of Prairie settlement patterns, and later commemorated five such distinctive patterns ranging from the Métis river lot at Batoche to the Mormon plat and irrigation systems at Stirling.⁴²

Interpretation now emphasizes ecological and geographical factors to explain the historical location, purpose, and fate of a site. In the management plan for Fort Beauséjour, “the relationship of people and landscape” is now considered a secondary theme after the more conventional “Struggle for a Continent,” explaining that “the surrounding landscape greatly influenced people’s daily lives, and was a major influence in determining where the fort would be located and the role it played.” The function of the environment may be productive (e.g., riparian grassland for ranching at the Bar U, dyked tidal marshes for farming at Grand Pré), strategic, or transportational (e.g., the Chignecto Isthmus at Fort Beauséjour and Fort Edward, the North Saskatchewan at Rocky Mountain House). The introduction of Commemorative Integrity Statements (CIS) by Parks Canada in 1994 coincided with and reinforced a marked turn toward landscape considerations in management plans. The Bar U CIS considers both cultural landscape elements (fences, corrals, dispersed ranch buildings) and natural features (unobstructed areas of grassland) as essential to maintaining the site’s “rural character.” The Fort Edward Management Plan maps the view planes to demonstrate the fort’s advantageous position above the junction of the Avon and St. Croix rivers and its role as a relay between Halifax and western Nova Scotia.⁴³

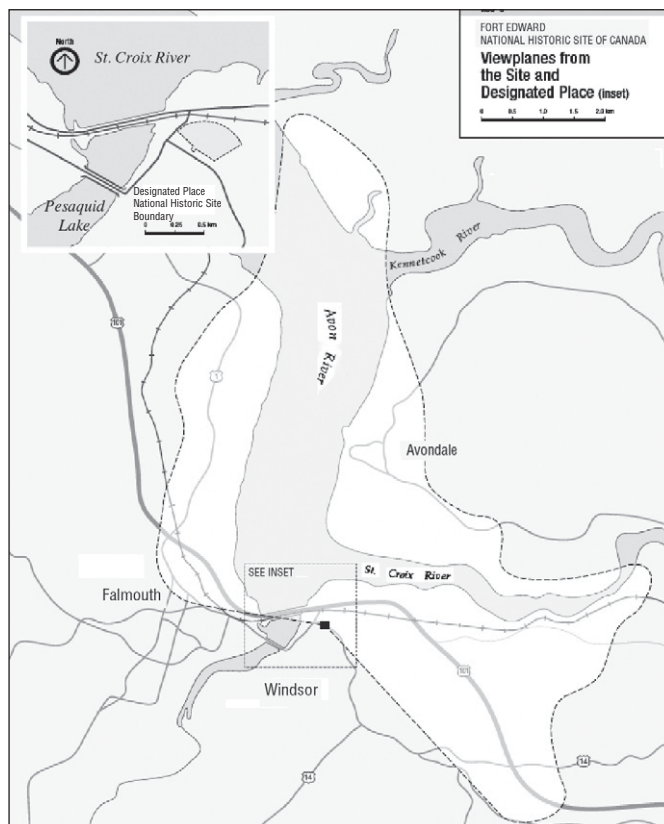
In addition, there has been a new turn to the local and the site itself that the older national narrative tended to disregard. Exhibits discuss the role of local preservation lobbies (such as the Annapolis Royal Garrison Commission), as

41 See William Wyckoff, “Understanding Western Places: The Historical Geographer’s View,” in Gary J. Hausladen, ed., *Western Places, American Myths: How We Think About the West*, (Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press, 2003), 21-56; Margaret Walsh, *The American West: Visions and Revisions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 4.

42 The other settlement patterns commemorated by Parks were typical prairie field patterns defined by shelterbelts at Motherwell Homestead; the “four corner” Ukrainian settlement at Gardenton, Manitoba; and the Mennonite Street Village at New Berghthal, Manitoba.

43 *Fort Beauséjour and Fort Gaspereaux National Historic Sites Management Plan*, 31; *Bar U National Historic Site Alberta Commemorative Integrity Statement 2000* (Parks Canada, 2001), 12; *Port-Royal, Fort Anne, Scots Fort and Fort Edward National Historic Sites of Canada Management Plan* (2002), 53.

ON FERTILE GROUND: LOCATING HISTORIC SITES IN THE LANDSCAPES OF FUNDY AND THE FOOTHILLS



Parks Canada, Fort Edward Management Plan, 2001
Courtesy of Parks Canada

well as the value and fragility of *in situ* archaeological resources (as at Head Smashed In Buffalo Jump, Melanson Settlement, and, to a lesser extent, Scots Fort).⁴⁴ Similarly, there is now more diversity in site aesthetics; the architecture of interpretative centres, which for many years preferred some variation on the fur trade post's Big House, now may adopt or correspond to landscape features. A wonderful illustration of this is the Interpretative Centre at Head-Smashed-In, whose exterior mimics the stratigraphic layers and colours of

⁴⁴ I say "lesser extent" because Scots Fort as a site is overshadowed by the more impressive features of Fort Anne, which sits on top of it. For a discussion of the archaeological excavation at Melanson Settlement, see Andr  e Crepeau and Brenda Dunn, "The Melanson Settlement: An Acadian Farming Community (ca. 1664-1755)," Research Bulletin, no. 250 (Ottawa: Environment Canada, 1986).



Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump Interpretative Centre
Photograph by the author

the surrounding Porcupine Hills, and whose five-leveled interior follows the sequence of the bison kill. There is also an explicit concern for environmental integrity beyond scenery that did not become commonplace until the late 1980s. National sites have a higher profile and therefore tend to draw more users, but on the whole they are governed by more stringent environmental legislation. Several sites in Fundy and Alberta are dealing with natural degradation, notably tidal or riverine erosion, and decades of human use. Moreover, they see their educational role as overtly ecological: to “demonstrate the principles of ecological sustainability in a rural setting,” as the Bar U states, and to “promote environmental citizenship and practice environmental stewardship.”⁴⁵

The most thought-provoking trend of late, however, is the attempt to convey change over time *in the location*. In its 1997 plan for Fort Beauséjour, Parks Canada declared that: “Cultural resources whose historic value derives from their witness to many periods in history *will be respected for that evolution*, not just for their existence at a single moment.” (emphasis added) This was a reversal from the fort’s previous plan of 1978, which proposed removing “inconsistent” structures (such as the picnic pavilion, relocated to the fort

45 Federal legislation presently includes the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act and the Parks Canada Cultural Resource Management Policy, which respect the historic values outlined in mandated Commemorative Integrity Statements. On Bar U, see *Bar U Ranch National Historic Site Management Plan* (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1995), 8-9.

ON FERTILE GROUND: LOCATING HISTORIC SITES IN THE LANDSCAPES
OF FUNDY AND THE FOOTHILLS



Rocky Mountain House, Fort 1 (North West Company, 1799-1821)
Photograph by the author

grounds from nearby Sackville in the 1920s).⁴⁶ Likewise, Melanson Settlement, commemorated primarily for its occupation by generations of Acadians in the seventeenth century, also retains the lines of rock demarcating the properties of Planter settlers who occupied the Acadian lands after the Deportation. Several Nova Scotia sites now use their reconstructions — the Officers' Quarters at Fort Anne (reconstructed 1935), the Habitation at Port Royal (1938-1939) — to discuss the evolution of preservation philosophy and changing attitudes toward restoration. This approach can dramatically limit the degree of intervention at a site, because the national *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places* (2003) requires the selection of one "period of significance" for restoration.⁴⁷ Interpretation that stops short of committing to full reconstruction or re-enactments permits site operation even if research is tentative, or if money is short. Rocky Mountain House uses four types of presentation at the four known fort sites, ranging from text panels overlooking open fields, to a metal structure that mimics the outline of a fur trade post; to, most ambitiously,

46 *Fort Beauséjour and Fort Gaspereaux Management Plan*, 16. On the other hand, the Fort Anne Management Plan states that ornamental shrubbery will be removed and mature trees not replaced (apart from those acting as a buffer along the town's main street), presumably in an attempt to recreate the more open viewplane of the site's occupation, 37.

47 *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada* (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 2003), 3 and following.

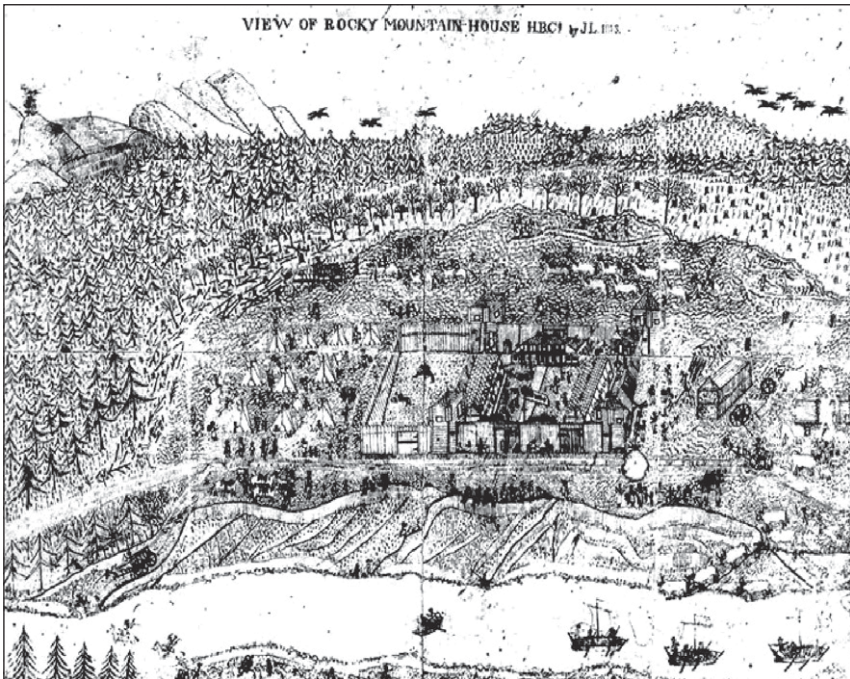


Melanson Settlement, 2005
Photograph by the Author

an overgrown archaeological dig site at the location of the earliest post that explains *three* periods of occupation: the post, a farm, and archaeological excavation between 1962-1963. A small play fort next to the museum is the most complete “fort” on site. “With all the likely sources of historical information exhausted and with a good deal of archaeological research completed, one is left with a set of very inconclusive conclusions,” concluded the site’s archaeologist in 1976.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the site opened to the public three years later. In retrospect, its frankness about the limits of knowledge and the confusion of history is Rocky Mountain House’s most admirable quality, and epitomizes the philosophical shift among public historians in the 1970s. Although essentially a creative response to budgetary restraints, it allowed this generation to enrich the bread-and-butter of the historic sites system (the fur trade/exploration narrative) with a layer of historiographical commentary about the retrieval, construction,

48 David Smyth, *The Fur Trade Posts at Rocky Mountain House* Manuscript Report, no. 197 (Ottawa: Parks Canada, National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, 1976), 149; Willam C. Noble, *The excavation and historical identification of Rocky Mountain House* (Ottawa: National Historic Sites Service, National and Historic Parks Branch, Dept. of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1973); *Rocky Mountain House National Historic Park Provisional Development Plan* (Ottawa: National Historic Sites Service, Parks Canada, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1969), 12.

ON FERTILE GROUND: LOCATING HISTORIC SITES IN THE LANDSCAPES
OF FUNDY AND THE FOOTHILLS



*View of Rocky Mountain House H.B. Co. by J. L. 1873,
Courtesy of Library and Archives Canada*

and presentation of history. This would become *de rigueur* at national sites, either in introductory and concluding text panels in museum displays (as at Fort Anne) or outside the interpretative centre as a contrast to the narrative within (as at Rocky Mountain House).

This new philosophy is not without its problems. Recent designations have not undermined the period characterization of East and West. Indeed, the Bar U, created in 1991, plays to perhaps the most enduringly popular image of the West, promising trail rides and chuckwagons serving cowboy grub.⁴⁹ Interpreting multiple periods of significance are to some extent inconsistent with the fact that most of these sites were designated because of an historical event — that is, a particular moment in time. To the public, destabilizing time as well as place is inherently more confusing. A blacksmith shop at Grand Pré, dated to the 1860s, appears to have no connection to the original story of the

49 The iconographic nature of the ranching landscape is discussed by Paul F. Starrs in “An Inescapable Range, or the Ranch as Everywhere,” in Hausladen, ed., *Western Places, American Myths*, 57-84; Simon Evans, *Bar U and Canadian Ranching History* (Calgary, AB: University of Calgary Press, 2004).

Deportation or its twentieth-century commemoration; although its stated use is to “represent a link to the return of the Acadians to the Maritimes,” it feels both historically and physically incongruous with the rest of the site.⁵⁰

On the other hand, a physical artifact is vastly more convincing than absence. A site’s authenticity does not depend on physical remains; but conveying the story of what happened is much easier with tangible evidence.⁵¹ This is particularly true for national sites, which must anticipate visitors from further afield, from a variety of cultural backgrounds, and with widely varying degrees of knowledge about the site. At the same time, the extensive reconstruction favoured by earlier generations has created a public expectation of historic sites. Neighbouring sites on Fundy offer a wonderful contrast: whereas Port Royal offers a fully reconstructed and furnished fort, Melanson Settlement merely manages vegetation in a sloping field to maintain “evocative views” in hopes of conveying a “sense of place.” Will visitors really gain a similar sense of the past from these sites? Yet no site can accurately recreate or maintain a period setting, leaving us with the anachronistic option of a historic built landscape situated in a dynamic natural one, or a setting largely indistinguishable from the everyday. I am reminded of this every time I see the 1873 drawing of Rocky Mountain House by Jean L’Heureux, with the forest encroaching on the fort and the river banks far broader than they are today.⁵²

Revision: Commemoration and Communities

The other trend in devolution has been the attempt to crack open designation as a white, Euro-Canadian project. The familiar burgundy plaques commemorating “imperial vision” at Fort Anne are now accompanied by panels mapping Mi’kmaq canoe routes and Acadian dyke construction, visible from the earthworks. At first glance, this is a rather superficial corrective; but as Christina Cameron has argued, retaining older designations provides a lesson in histori-

50 The blacksmith shop was relocated onto the site in 1968. *Grand Pré Management Plan*, Appendix 3, 54.

51 The Nara Document on Authenticity, of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (1994), recognizes that our value of cultural properties — i.e., its authenticity — derives from a variety of sources of information, which “may include form and design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions and techniques, location and setting, and spirit and feeling, and other internal and external factors,” (Item 13). My point is not to make light of the intangible factors (spirit, feeling, traditions, etc.) in *determining* authenticity, but to argue that physical objects, something the public can see and touch and walk around, will have a greater impact in the communication *of* that authenticity.

52 Taylor discusses the reconstruction of Port Royal and Fort Anne in *Negotiating the Past*, 116-19; *Melanson Settlement Management Plan*, 32, 39; *Port-Royal, Fort Anne, Scots Fort and Fort Edward National Historic Sites of Canada Management Plan*, 24. The L’Heureux drawing is held at the LAC, “View of Rocky Mountain House H.B. Co. by J. L. 1873,” (cartographic material), by Jean L’Heureux, AMICUS no. 29835731/NMC 19840.

ON FERTILE GROUND: LOCATING HISTORIC SITES IN THE LANDSCAPES
OF FUNDY AND THE FOOTHILLS

ography, by reminding us what we used to value.⁵³ But this has been motivated not simply by academic changes, but by political ones. In an officially multicultural Canada, after all, it is hard to rationalize a strictly bicultural narrative except *as* an artifact. From the perspective of the federal government, it is also an extremely useful way of downloading responsibility, or motivating community involvement — or achieving the first under the guise of the second. The lure of the local is the new marketing strategy in a globalized world, suggests Brian Osborne: “Local coalitions of financial and political actors are assuming a lot more power to regulate their local economies, and they are setting objectives that are place-specific and maximize unique histories and assets of local places.”⁵⁴ At the same time, reinterpretation has been the result of political negotiations, as Acadian, Mi’kmaq, and Blackfoot claims of “homeland” jostle the naturalized Canadian boundaries. Until the late 1970s, local or regional constituencies were not the main concern, and marginalized histories required alternative forms of commemoration. When the Dominion Atlantic Railway erected the Evangeline statue in 1920, for example, the Société Nationale l’Assomption responded by erecting a memorial cross and St. Charles Church, styles of memorial presumably more in keeping with community values. But the learning curve of public consultation in the early 1980s was a steep one, with Parks Canada declaring its intent to redress deficiencies in commemorating aboriginals, women, and “cultural communities.” Now Parks Canada uses “ancestral homesite” to describe both Grand Pré and Melanson, a phrase that dates to the (belated) 1982 designation of Grand Pré by the HSMBC.⁵⁵

In the West, the Bar U attempts to diversify the cowboy myth by profiling John Ware, the popular African-American rancher, and the ranch’s aboriginal employees. Recent scholarship by aboriginal and environmental historians has sought to correct two stereotypes: that aboriginals existed in a “state of nature,” by demonstrating how native civilizations across the New World manipulated their environments; and that they represent the “obligatory early chapter [in

53 “Imperial vision” comes from the plaque at Fort Anne erected by the HSMBC in 1928, commemorating Samuel Vetch, commander of the garrison at Annapolis Royal and governor of Nova Scotia between 1710-1713 and 1714. Christina Cameron, “Commemoration: A moving target?” in Symons, ed., *The Place of History*, 27-34.

54 Brian S. Osborne, “From Native Pines to Diasporic Geese: Placing Culture, Setting Our Sites, Locating Identity in a Transnational Canada,” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 31, no. 1 (2006): 163.

55 Parks Canada, *National Historic Sites of Canada System Plan* (Ottawa: 1997); *Melanson Settlement Management Plan*, 17. I agree with Geoffrey White that revisionists have “tended to presume an inevitable, binary opposition between hegemonic state-sponsored memory and marginalized counter-memories,” when adaptations at these sites suggest that such opposition is neither historically accurate nor impossible to overcome. Geoffrey White, “Introduction: Public History and National Narrative,” *Museum Anthropology* 21, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1997): 3-7.

Canadian history] — just after landforms, flora and fauna,” by discussing the role of aboriginals beyond the “contact” phase.⁵⁶ The 1980 planning proposal for Head-Smashed-In reflected this evolving historiography, by recommending integration of the adjacent Peigan and Blood reserves, especially for consultation on any ceremonial or ritual activities; but also proposing onsite recreations including a tipi village below the kill site. This was never constructed, part of a trend away from popular but inauthentic representations and toward archaeological presentation on the one hand and living aboriginal interpreters on the other. Head-Smashed-In has become an international case study in exhibit design and aboriginal employment. Nor is this revision confined to the site itself. Southern Plains artifacts have generated a great deal of publicity over repatriation and the Eurocentric nature of conventional museum presentation. The new permanent Blackfoot gallery at Calgary’s Glenbow Museum, *Niitsitapiisinni: Our Way of Life*, is a direct response to the controversy over its 1988 *The Spirit Sings* exhibit.⁵⁷

Again, these revisions are not without flaws. They attract accusations of political correctness, or concerns over the demise of national history. When Port Royal Habitation profiles Mathieu DaCosta, an African interpreter who “probably” travelled to Atlantic Canada, it justifiably connects the Habitation to the seventeenth-century Atlantic world, but it also reads as a rather tenuous

56 For example, see William M. Denevan, “The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 82, no. 3 (1992): 369-85; Richard White and William Cronon, “Ecological Change and Indian-White Relations,” in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 4, *History of Indian-White Relations*, Wilcomb E. Washburn, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 417-27; Robert Coutts, “York Factory as a Native Community: Public History Research, Commemoration and the Challenge to Interpretation,” *Prairie Forum* 17, no. 2 (Fall 1992): 288-9. On Bar U, see *Bar U Commemorative Integrity Statement*, 27.

57 On the original proposal for Head-Smashed-In, see Makale & Kylo Planning Associates Ltd, *Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump Interpretative Concept* (Edmonton, AB: Makale & Kylo Planning Associates Ltd., 1980). Historians in Ontario’s Parks branch government, struggling with the effects of popular but stereotypical reconstructions at Midland and elsewhere in the 1950s and 1960s, rejected a proposed “Indian Village” in Algonquin Park as inaccurate representation of aboriginal life in the area (*Proposed Indian Village: Algonquin Provincial Park*, undated memo, in Archives of Ontario, “Algonquin Park Foundation & Task Force,” RG 47-64 77-455 Box 5 File). On aboriginal involvement at Head-Smashed-In, see Jack Brink, “Blackfoot and Buffalo Jumps: Native People and the Head-Smashed-In Project,” 19-43, and Ed Sponholz, “Head Smashed-In Buffalo Jump: A Centre for Cultural Preservation and Understanding,” 45-59 in *Alberta: Studies in Arts and Sciences* 3, no. 1 (1992); Claudia Notzke, “Indigenous Tourism Development in Southern Alberta, Canada: Tentative Engagement,” *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 12, no. 1 (2004): 29-54. On the Glenbow’s new exhibit and its “new” relationship with its Blackfoot constituency, see Gerald T. Conaty and Beth Carter, “Our Story in Our Words: Diversity and Equality in the Glenbow Museum,” in Robert R. Janes and Gerald T. Conaty, eds., *Looking Reality in the Eye: Museums and Social Responsibility* (Calgary, AB: University of Calgary Press, 2005), 43-58.

ON FERTILE GROUND: LOCATING HISTORIC SITES IN THE LANDSCAPES
OF FUNDY AND THE FOOTHILLS

connection placed here to appeal to the African-Canadian population in Nova Scotia.⁵⁸ The new wording of “designated place” (replacing historic site or even historic place) reflects the supplanting of the concept of “historical significance” by that of “heritage value” in the global preservation community, including the new Canadian Register of Historic Places. According to this line of thinking, a place can have multiple values, and the historical is merely one among several sources of significance, which include cultural, social, spiritual, and aesthetic. The values-based approach is part of a reaction against the so-called “heritage priesthood”: expert appraisal by aloof academics, traditional canons and hierarchies of importance, and numeric assessments of building integrity.⁵⁹ However democratic and sensitive it appears, it does complicate a site’s *raison d’être*. If it speaks to cultural or spiritual as well as historic values, for example, it functions as both museum and memorial, “a site of personal emotion and remembering.” In the mid-1920s, pilgrimages to Grand Pré were orchestrated by Henri Bourassa and his newspaper *Le Devoir*, and in 1930 by a group of Louisiana parishes to help mark the 175th anniversary of the Acadian deportation.⁶⁰ As a result, these sites may also provide political and performance space. Re-enactment-style activities reinforce collective memory among participants, and help fix particular interpretations of historical events into place. Grand Pré has hosted family reunions, *les journées acadiennes*, *la Journée commémorative officielle du Grand Dérangement* and *la Fête nationale des Acadiens*, replete with dancing, folk music, mass, and traditional costumes, directed primarily toward an Acadian constituency. Where space is contested, however, public performances resemble contemporary protests more than historical re-enactment. Local ranchers around the Bar U (dubbed “the Pekisko Creek Gang”) have made the rough fescue prairie in the lower foothills a *cause célèbre*, staging rides led by folksinger/rancher Ian Tyson past historic ranches to publicize their protest against sour gas development. The grassland, whose deep root systems would be threatened by exploratory drilling, has recently been proposed for designation as Heritage Rangeland.⁶¹

58 See A.J.B. Johnston, “Mathieu DaCosta and Early Canada: Possibilities and Probabilities” (Halifax, N.S.: Parks Canada, 2000).

59 Randall Mason, “Assessing Values in Conservation Planning: Methodological Issues and Choices,” in Marta de la Torre, ed., *Assessing the Values of Cultural Heritage* (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 2002), 5-30; Frits Pannekoek, “The Rise of a Heritage Priesthood,” in Tomlan, ed., *Preservation of What, For Whom?*, 29-36.

60 Geoffrey White, “Museum/Memorial Shrine: National Narrative in National Spaces,” *Museum Anthropology* 21, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1997): 8-27. For a discussion of the early pilgrimages to Grand Pré, see LeBlanc, *Postcards from Acadie*, 124-9.

61 “Open grass versus gas: On the slopes of the Rockies, a classic tug of war is playing out between energy companies and ranchers,” *Calgary Herald* (11 October 2003); “Alberta’s home range under siege by drillers,” *Calgary Herald* (August 8, 2005).

There are certainly advantages to such uses. It reminds us that many of these sites were maintained by the community prior to state designation; it helps prevent a static “glass case” or “period piece” approach for visitors; it is arguably truer to the spirit of the place’s earlier role; and it is more honest about the contested and political role of places than a universal narrative. On the other hand, such decentralization of intent may complicate or confuse a site’s function. Its commemoration as a site of national significance, of course, hinges on its relationship to a national history, and thus its purpose is to educate a Canadian public about that shared history. But its significance may (and likely does) differ to local populations, particularly if there are different ethnic groups subscribing to different versions of the place’s history. The Québécois Catholics viewed Grand Pré as home to a heroic ancestry, but without the same language of nation as the displaced Cajuns. Meanwhile, these pilgrimages prompted a backlash from Anglophone residents, who then sought to have *their* hero, Colonel Noble, commemorated on the site. What should happen if the demand of the historical occupant conflicts with the current occupant, or with a national or visiting audience? Given, in particular, aboriginal land claims, this kind of question is likely to arise and yet a policy of “decentralization” ensures there can be no standard policy response.

A Question of Boundaries: From Nation to ...?

Despite the thematic changes in interpretation in both Maritime and Western commemorative sites, we have yet to reconceptualize our sense of historical geography around the singular natural features that shaped these sites in the first place. Designation and operation by provincial and national agencies obscures the ecological basis of historic sites, and thus the historical landscape beneath the modern one. In other words, the political conditions under which sites are managed do not match those under which they were originally created. A slight but telling example: the Isthmus of Chignecto was a major transportation route in the eighteenth century, but the Chignecto sites now find themselves bypassed by the Trans Canada Highway. A more profound one: no single Acadian territory was ever formally recognized, so locating a commemorative site is problematic. As Clive Doucet asks, “[W]here did Acadie fit in this grand world of national accomplishment? Where were the little farms and fishing coves of Acadie? Was there a place?”⁶² If a historic site aims to conjure up a past landscape, then the very designation of national or provincial significance actually works against that. Twentieth-century details intrude as we attempt to imagine an eighteenth-century view.

62 Doucet, 80. *Fort Beauséjour Management Plan* (1997) reports that a third of all visitors had trouble finding the site, 26.

ON FERTILE GROUND: LOCATING HISTORIC SITES IN THE LANDSCAPES OF FUNDY AND THE FOOTHILLS

It also hinders ecological management. In 1995, Grand Pré National Rural Historic District became the first such designation in the Parks Canada system, but as Parks admits, this kind of designation is essentially honorary. Local land-owners have formed the Queen Anne Marsh Body to maintain the dyke remnants of the *marais de Saint-Charles* near Melanson Settlement, but “there is no comprehensive protection of the geographic context as a whole.”⁶³ Apart from a nod to defence networks or Acadian settlement patterns, these sites are not conceived as *regional* groupings, except to attract tourists and direct visitor traffic.

As state-sanctioned sites, there is no mention of regionalism as a political or academic sentiment in the faces they present to the public. This is despite the fact that jurisdiction has been an issue on several occasions, most often when Ottawa sought to acquire land around the site from the province. Not surprisingly, the most contentious relationship has been between Ottawa and Alberta. The province “actively discouraged” federal attempts to purchase the Cochrane Ranch, which would interfere with a highway planned by the province; the federal parks branch would eventually buy the Bar U instead. Ironically, Cochrane Ranch was subsequently developed as a provincial historic site, though it was later turned over to private management. In 1972 the provincial Environment Conservation Authority admitted that “inflexible attitudes” over mineral rights had left Alberta as the only province in Canada without a National Historic Park.⁶⁴ The cozy rhetoric of the “family of national historic sites” carefully mutes any reference to federal-provincial tensions that remain close to the surface. After all, corporate ranches like the Bar U and Cochrane Ranch are tangible illustrations of a National Policy that envisioned the west as a hinterland for metropolitan forces of Eastern financing and influence. Interestingly, though, even Alberta has chosen to fight its battles elsewhere. The remote homestead of Alequiers, southwest of Longview in the foothills, was recently designated for “its representation of the era of homesteading that followed the break up of the large corporate ranches.” Western historian and native Albertan Lewis G. Thomas once called the break up of ranch holdings a “colossal national blunder” that lay at the root of western alienation, but there is no mention of this in the site’s statement of significance.⁶⁵

63 *Melanson Settlement Management Plan*, 20.

64 Rasmussen, “The Heritage Boom,” 247-8; *Report and Position Paper on the Public Advisory Committee*, in Environment Conservation Authority, *Conservation of Historical and Archaeological Resources in Alberta*, 31.

65 <http://www.historicplaces.ca/rep-reg/affichage-display_e.aspx?Id=4995>, (viewed 8 January 2007); Alberta Community Development, Heritage Resource Management Branch, File: Des. 2121; Lewis G. Thomas, “Associations and Communications,” presidential address to the Canadian Historical Association, *Historical Papers*, 1973. That is not to say that regional tension is not recognized in the research prepared for site operation, simply that it rarely makes its way through to the interpretative or presentation stage. William Naftel, *The Cochrane Ranch*, Canadian Historic Sites, Occasional Papers in Archaeology and History, No. 16 (Ottawa: National

Conclusion

And yet this is precisely the relationship that “democratization and decentralization” was designed to address. Thirty-five years on, how well has this policy worked out? Parks Canada and the HSMBC have done a commendable job in an unenviable position. Historic sites really are servants to two masters. As the public face of academic discourse, they try to disseminate new, challenging interpretations of Canadian history, and yet as an agent of citizenship, they must operate on par with the current political climate. The generation of historians who inherited Pelletier’s policy amid official multiculturalism, two decades of provincial-federal head-butting, *and* a limited identities historiography, have known a decentralized, pluralist Canada for which the Laurentian thesis was markedly unsuitable. But was there an alternative? How can a federal institution, designed to tell national stories, incorporate resistance to and difference within that story? To what extent can we reinterpret *in situ* physical resources and established popular stories to encompass new perspectives? How far will the elastic of narrative stretch before it disintegrates into an historiographical archipelago? For an environmental historian, this struggle is a familiar one, because environmental history also requires having a foot in two camps: to evaluate ecological detail while drawing conclusions about its larger significance.

At the very least, it is clear that national historic sites are no longer married uncritically to a heavy-handed, centralized national narrative. Parallel changes in the Bay of Fundy and the foothills of the Rocky Mountains — examples drawn deliberately from opposite ends of the country — demonstrate a system-wide evolution in site management. By incorporating recent historiography, which critiques the older version, even as it corrects and adds to it, public historians have kept the idea of a national story from becoming anachronistic. When the older characterization emphasized territorial evolution, it relied on an end point — the creation of Canada — that made for a neatly finished story and a politically reassuring message. Though still obligated to convey that feel-good reassurance, site interpretation now leans toward an *unfinished* story: that of ongoing occupation of place and change over time. Of the three aspects of diversity — environmental, ethnic, and regional — the revisions to include, and protect, natural resources have probably been the most successful. (And nature, after all, can’t take issue with how it is depicted on text panels). Negotiating site boundaries and presentation with participant groups has been a

Historic Parks and Sites Branch, Indian and Northern Affairs, 1977) discusses frankly the agenda of the National Policy. Ian Clarke refers to the force of “Central Canadian colonial imperialism” in his essay “Motherwell Historic Park: Structural and Use History of the Landscape and Outbuildings,” in Ian Clarke, Lyle Dick, and Sarah Carter, *Motherwell Historic Park* (Ottawa: Parks Canada, National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, 1983), 166.

ON FERTILE GROUND: LOCATING HISTORIC SITES IN THE LANDSCAPES
OF FUNDY AND THE FOOTHILLS

more contested process. Attempts at inclusion can lead to a feeling of incongruity and confusion between history as past and site as present. Whereas we used to be concerned about having too much geography, we now seem to have too many histories. But this confusion and complexity only make public history in Canada a wonderful area of study.

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