

Volume VI of the D.C.B.: The 'Last Survivor(s)' Revisited

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dence. Thus the slow transition to industrial capitalism began not only with dependency, but in the interaction of production systems in the social formation of the Maritime provinces.

These are not conclusions but suggestions, and they are hardly very original ideas, since Ian McKay and others are already working along these lines. As McKay and others have demonstrated, there are valuable lessons to be learned from models of development which have been applied elsewhere, and historians cannot afford to dismiss the theoretical work which sociologists and others bring to our attention. If the effort to apply models borrowed from Latin America and elsewhere sometimes fails, it is never so unrewarding as the gathering of data with no reference to theory at all. By guiding our reasoning from the particular to the general, theory tells us what we know. By making apparent that which it cannot explain, theory may guide us to the areas of historical experience which we must still explore.

ERIC SAGER

Volume VI of the D.C.B.: The 'last Survivor(s)' Revisited

WITH THE PUBLICATION OF VOLUME VI of the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1987), covering individuals who died in the 1821 to 1835 period, ten volumes have now appeared. Whether as contributors, reviewers or readers very few Canadian historians have escaped the grasp of this collective biographical project, although one must admit to meeting the occasional unrevised and unrepentant 20th century specialist who has not yet cracked its covers. Some academics have become so enamoured with the project that they faithfully serve as both contributors and reviewers of various volumes, a delightful example of self-serving impartiality. There might even be the occasional contributor who hoped his judgement that the "final result is a powerful indication that individual and collective biographical analysis remains one of the most valid instruments in the reconstruction and comprehension of the past" would remain buried in the pages of that once obscure journal *Acadiensis*.¹ With this confession out of the way I welcome the opportunity to embark upon another assessment of the *D.C.B.*, particularly since volume VI might be the last glimpse of the "last Survivor(s)" of the loyalist first generation in the Maritimes.² The period from 1821 to 1835 represents the final years for a good number of the loyalists who arrived in New Brunswick and

1 W.G. Godfrey, "Some Thoughts on the *D.C.B.* and Maritime Historiography", *Acadiensis*, VII, 2 (Spring 1978), p. 115.

2 I borrow this expression from Phillip Buckner's biography of Ward Chipman (p. 143).

Nova Scotia during and after the Revolutionary War. Of the 125 biographical entries dealing with figures active in the three Maritime colonies, 26.5 per cent of the 64 Nova Scotian entries were loyalists and 50 per cent of the 44 New Brunswick entries were loyalists.³ Prince Edward Island's loyalists apparently lacked the staying power or prominence to make this volume as only one loyalist biography out of 17 entries was discovered. Despite its Island limitations, this volume provides a good opportunity to compare how the *D.C.B.* studies mesh with recent scholarship on the loyalists.

But there are more than loyalists in this volume. Religious figures, for example, receive considerable attention as usual; insight and balance abound and there is a consistent attempt to present all sides of the individual and his contribution. Judith Fingard makes clear that Reverend Oliver Arnold, admittedly a loyalist as well as a religious figure, might have served his white congregation well but his handling of Indians, another of his responsibilities, was far from praiseworthy. His actions "created the impression among colonists that the Indians were at best exploitable, at worst dispensable" (p. 14). Goldwin French's contribution on the father of Maritime Methodism, William Black, convincingly and thoroughly charts his progress but bluntly acknowledges that in sheer numbers his mission might have enjoyed less than total success. "After all, in 1827 only 7.6 per cent of the people of Nova Scotia were Methodists; 16 per cent were Baptists, and the Anglicans and Presbyterians greatly outnumbered both denominations" (p. 67). Lesser known religious figures took more time to find their niche and reveal as much about the patient tolerance of their congregations as about their own successful or unsuccessful ministries. Presbyterian minister John Young's gambling and drinking habits moved him from church to church in New York, Lower Canada and Upper Canada until he settled his 6 feet 6 inches frame in Sheet Harbour, Nova Scotia, where he was "universally esteemed" (p. 823). Roman Catholic priest Thomas Grace was constantly falling from grace in one inappropriate posting after another, beloved by many of the ordinary people with whom he worked but the bane of his superiors. As Bishop Joseph-Octave Plessis put it: "How can one reform a man of this age, who has his habits formed so long, and Irish ones at that" (p. 293)!

Officialdom is not spared either. While Murray Young tries very hard to show the better side of New Brunswick Lieutenant Governor George Stracey Smyth's interests and activities, he concludes that in political matters Smyth was "the most ineffective of all New Brunswick's lieutenant governors of the colonial era" (p. 727). On Prince Edward Island, office holder Charles Wright is credited with a legacy of "incompetence and drunkenness" (p. 819). Francis Bolger's picture of

3 There is a total of 479 biographies in this volume of which I count 125 as dealing with the Maritimes. This figure does not square with the *D.C.B.* career/geography count on pp. 898-9 and 901 because the editors double-count by listing people active in more than one colony while I placed people only in the colony where the major portion of their career was spent.

Lieutenant Governor Sir Aretas William Young's concern for the tenantry is now replaced by Phillip Buckner's portrait of a status quo oriented, cautious, letter-of-the-instructions-only governor who had "meagre" accomplishments (p. 821). At an earlier date Caesar Colclough sat on the Prince Edward Island bench, as chief justice from 1805 to 1813, a man accused of many things including publicly beating his manservant and "often seen walking inebriated in the streets of Charlottetown" according to J.M. Bumsted. At the same time, the biography of Colclough (pp. 160-4), which is quite fair despite the impression conveyed above, and those of other Island figures, such as Angus MacAulay (pp. 412-5) and John Stewart (pp. 735-8), provide a fascinating new dimension to the intricacies of early 19th century Island politics. The "Byzantine political and legal situation" is well captured as governor after governor was ensnared in battles between the "Loyal Electors" and the "old party", both of which warring factions, it turns out, were equally committed to the land speculation of which they each accused the other. The simplistic picture of absentee landlords as the only villains of early Island history is thus dealt another severe blow.

Pre-loyalist/loyalist tensions in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia are a frequently assumed feature of the Maritimes in the post-revolutionary period, but judging from the *D.C.B.* evidence the lines were far from crisply drawn. While James Simonds clearly suffered at the hands of the New Brunswick loyalist elite, not receiving a public office "until his appointment to the magistracy in 1816 when he was 80" (p. 719), his cousin and trading partner, William Hazen, "rapidly moved to the heart of the loyalist functionary aristocracy" (p. 719). As well, Sunbury County, the heartland of pre-loyalists, regularly elected its older settlers (i.e. pre-loyalists) as members of the Assembly, James Taylor for example (pp. 755-6), but also turned to loyalists such as Samuel Denny Street (pp. 739-41) and to a committed anti-loyalist outsider James Glenie. In Nova Scotia, pre-loyalist Richard John Uniacke (pp. 789-92) found his career progress frequently frustrated by loyalist opposition and suspicion, only receiving appointment to the Council after the departure of loyalist Lieutenant Governor John Wentworth. But Judith Tulloch's careful analysis of pre-loyalist William Cottnam Tonge's career reveals both loyalist and non-loyalist support. Her unraveling of the country versus court parties is well done and her concluding observation appears valid for all the Maritime colonies: "opposition to executive government continued to be motivated more by self-interest and personality than by coherent political philosophy" (pp. 778-83) and, one might add, it transcended loyalist/pre-loyalist divisions.

Clashes and coalitions between old settlers and loyalist newcomers, as well as indications of the arrival in substantial numbers of Scottish immigrants, confirm Fernand Ouellet's perception of "sociétés qui en sont encore à une étape préliminaire dans le processus de leur formation".⁴ The blurred and very much

4 Fernand Ouellet, "Propos sur le Dictionnaire biographique et les classes dirigeantes", *Acadiensis*, XIV, 2 (Spring 1985), p. 146.

in flux social and political structures are nowhere better demonstrated than in Prince Edward Island where, at this unique moment in the Island's history, almost everyone was from away! Of the 17 Prince Edward Island entries I have identified, only one was a native-born Islander, seven were Scottish born, five were born in England, three were born in Ireland and one's birthplace remains unknown. Again and again in the political, educational and religious spheres in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, the particularly adept among the latest arrivals capitalized upon the developing nature of the new societies to make a substantial impact. To take only one area in one colony, the Scots' emerging presence in the economy of New Brunswick is well sketched in the excellent biographies of John Black (pp. 61-2), Hugh Johnston (pp. 354-6), Christopher Scott (pp. 696-8) and Robert Pagan (pp. 561-3). Trading in timber and fish, wholesaling and retailing, ship-building and ship-owning, smuggling if necessary, and founding banks to provide the always scarce credit and cash were some of the entrepreneurial activities which quickly made these gentlemen key figures in control of a substantial portion of the colonial economy. David MacMillan, Bill Acheson and Roger Nason deserve to be commended for the thorough and lucid treatment of the early 19th century New Brunswick economy presented in their combined contributions.

It is interesting that the two members of this Scottish bourgeoisie who played major political roles, Hugh Johnston and Robert Pagan, both supported the opposition cause against Lieutenant Governor Thomas Carleton and the loyalist elite. Pagan was not only a Scot but a loyalist as well and his opposition position is one of several hints concerning the non-monolithic nature of New Brunswick loyalism. Ann Condon's treatment of the New Brunswick loyalist elite argues that, at least among loyalist leaders, there was a clear consensus and blueprint for the development of their new colony. David Bell, on the contrary, sees deep divisions within loyalist ranks at Saint John, particularly over the political complexion of New Brunswick, divisions which led to immediate political turmoil. Neil MacKinnon attempts to examine both the elite and the rank and file in Nova Scotia and presents conclusions which both reinforce and expand the sometimes contradictory positions of Condon and Bell.⁵ Where does *D.C.B.* loyalist scholarship fit with this recent work?

One obvious but major question is where the loyalists were from. Esther Clark Wright sometime ago demolished the myth of Massachusetts as the dominant contributor but Condon's elite is, quite accurately, dominated by Massachusetts men. Bell feels that a part of the bitterness and divisiveness in Saint John was occasioned by non-Massachusetts loyalists, who were the overwhelming majority and resented the emerging Massachusetts dominance. MacKinnon

5 Ann G. Condon, *The Envy of the American States: The Loyalist Dream for New Brunswick* (Fredericton, 1984); David G. Bell, *Early Loyalist Saint John: The Origin of New Brunswick Politics* (Fredericton, 1983); Neil MacKinnon, *This Unfriendly Soil: The Loyalist Experience in Nova Scotia, 1783-1791* (Kingston, 1986).

demonstrates that in Nova Scotia among the legitimately American loyalists, 40 per cent were from New York, 15 per cent were from other Middle Colonies, only 20 per cent were from New England, and 25 per cent, including black and white, were from the Southern Colonies. Bearing in mind that the *D.C.B.* largely focuses on the most prominent, successful and permanent, of the 17 Nova Scotian loyalist entries, 35.3 per cent were from Massachusetts, 29.4 per cent were from the Middle Colonies, 11.8 per cent were from the South, and 23.5 per cent were disbanded British veterans of the Revolutionary War and not really American loyalists at all.⁶ In New Brunswick the *D.C.B.*'s 22 loyalist entries contain 59.2 per cent New Englanders, 13.6 per cent from the Middle Colonies, 13.6 per cent from the South, and 13.6 per cent more disbanded British veterans. The non-New England presence is apparent but so is the New England tendency to persist and successfully to pursue prominence as defined by the *D.C.B.*

Growing out of the differing colonial backgrounds, as well as class/ethnic/religious/occupational variations, Neil MacKinnon sees a lack of cohesion, and indeed a very real fragmentation, among Nova Scotian loyalists. In New Brunswick at first glance, however, there is substantial confirmation of Ann Condon's committed and united loyalist elite. Jonathan Bliss (pp. 74-6), George Leonard (pp. 394-6), Archibald McLean (pp. 473-4), and John Saunders (pp. 683-7) were all firm supporters of the executive branch of government, an established church, and rule by gentlemen and/or landed gentry, while actively office-holding and office-seeking and, in several instances, passing on offices to their children. On the other hand, Stair Agnew (pp. 6-7), Robert Pagan (pp. 561-3) and Samuel Denny Street (p. 741) emerge as loyalists quite willing to challenge the elite on questions like assembly rights and privileges, the proper pattern of economic development, the rights of religious dissenters and the need for a wider distribution of offices. As well, the entries on Ward Chipman (pp. 135-45) and John Robinson (pp. 654-5) reveal the possibility of actually residing in crass, mercantile Saint John, perhaps even dirtying one's hands in commerce, while retaining membership in the Fredericton-centred elite and, at times, daring to disagree with the establishment position on some questions. Likewise in Nova Scotia the "uncompromising Toryism" of Michael Wallace (pp. 798-801), with his almost "counter-revolutionary design for Nova Scotia's economic and political development", sharply contrasts with Thomas Henry Barclay's (pp. 33-6) "forceful campaign to enhance the assembly's role as the representative branch of the legislature" so that it could effectively curb and review both council and lieutenant governor. On balance, *D.C.B.* loyalist scholarship blends neatly with MacKinnon's recently published work in that while some of the more select loyalists "were usurping the loyalist image and

6 My definition of loyalist includes all who were treated as loyalist at the time of their arrival, an elastic approach which allows some rather unloyalist or anti-loyalist individuals, such as Samuel Denny Street, to be included. This approach differs from J.M. Bumsted's probably more valid definition in *Understanding the Loyalists* (Sackville, 1986), pp. 43-9.

shaping it to their own ends, the great majority were placing increased emphasis upon their democratic principles and instincts".⁷ To agree with the "great majority" assertion might be going too far, but the presence of opposition loyalists, moderate conservatives and ultra-tories is quite apparent.

There is one issue raised in recent loyalist writing, however, which the *D.C.B.* does not, and probably cannot, deal with in a totally effective fashion. David Bell alludes to a "significant exodus" of disillusioned loyalists to the United States and Canada in the late 1780s.⁸ Neil MacKinnon presents in distressing detail the extent of and the reasons for the very substantial loyalist exodus from Nova Scotia, with 74 per cent of the departing Shelburne residents in 1786 and 1787 listed as heading for a United States destination. Of the *D.C.B.*'s 17 Nova Scotian loyalists, four or 23.5 per cent depart, three to the United States and one to Canada, while of 22 New Brunswick loyalists only one departed, heading to the United States. Isolated but contradictory comments are found about this loyalist desertion of their loyalist asylums. If Munson Jarvis is to be believed, the migration was inconsequential because "generally speaking those that have gone back from New Brunswick were a set of poor wretches.... Very few people of any consequence have left us" (pp. 349-50). But the advice Daniel Morehouse gave to his surviving children in 1829 perhaps more accurately reflected the frustration and disillusionment of some first generation loyalists. He felt that his children should "sell and dispose of all the property I have left them as soon as they can dispose of it without making too great a sacrifice, and remove to another country where their labour may yield them a better return" (pp. 518-9).

It is probably unfair to label as a deficiency neglect of those who left, since both the historical record and their significance are naturally diminished or somewhat inconsequential as a result of their departure. And, of course, the *D.C.B.* is committed to providing "authoritative information about the significant figures of Canada's past". Nonetheless, this is likely the charge that will be most frequently levelled at the *D.C.B.*, that the quest for the authoritative and significant will inevitably lead to the neglect of the inarticulate and "insignificant", even though the latter groups collectively might be the key to an understanding of the nature of their society. As in some other volumes, volume VI reveals a conscious attempt to inject the inarticulate — Indians, blacks, Acadians, and women are present — but it obviously remains a difficult task. Among the 125 Maritime entries there are five women: a poet, a loyalist and effective business-woman, two mistresses of the powerful one of whom was a very effective estate-manager, and an Indian woman seduced in the home where she was an apprentice labourer by the son of her master (pp. 777-8, 181-2, 516-8, 121-2, 282-3). While the five women entries are only a small beginning, they actually tell us a great deal about the circumscribed, and indeed oppressed, role they were allowed to play which in turn creates an alternative perspective about

7 MacKinnon, *This Unfriendly Soil*, pp. 135-6.

8 Bell, *Early Loyalist Saint John*, p. 133.

the social structure with which they had to contend.

If the *D.C.B.* has managed to achieve one of the primary goals of all first-rate biography, to present not only an individual's life but a significant insight into the social, economic and political milieu, the world in which that individual operated, then it should be able to withstand charges of being a series of unrepresentative and elitist tomes. Volume VI has presented in arresting detail a well-crafted tapestry that does indeed do justice to the individuals examined and, at the same time, provides a real insight concerning the shades of loyalism, fragments concerning the plight of the largely inarticulate and, in general, a reasonably comprehensive and lucid understanding of the early 19th century Maritimes. One can only hope that the great God S.S.H.R.C.C. [Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada], which giveth but also taketh away at times, will recognize the wisdom of and need to extend the *D.C.B.* project beyond the present 1900 terminal date. Even those poor benighted 20th century specialists deserve the opportunity to contribute to this monumental and ever more impressive historical project.

W.G. GODFREY

Parish Perspectives: Recent Work in Community History Within Atlantic Canada

A VISIT TO ANY BOOKSTORE IN Atlantic Canada will soon demonstrate that the "renaissance" of interest in regional history, which has prevailed over the last 20 years, is dominated, at least in volume, by non-academics. The bulk of the material available for purchase has been researched and written by "amateurs", i.e. by those without graduate training in the discipline of history. This abundant literature rarely receives mention in the review section of academic journals, thanks to the belief that, for the most part, it has little to offer to those engaged in rigorous and analytical exploration of Atlantic Canada's past. As a test of the validity of that negative judgment, several recent works by amateur historians, all in the vein of community studies, have been looked at.

Of the ten items examined, about half made reference to the work of university scholars but those regional scholars most often read by amateurs tend to be a few veterans such as MacNutt, Clark and Bolger, rather than the people who currently dominate the discipline. Moreover, monographs are favoured over periodical literature. For example, *Acadiensis*, despite being widely hailed in academic circles as essential reading for students of the region's history, received mention in only two of the books included in this review. The problem is not that the