

# Tenant, Landlord and Historian: A Thematic Review of the "Polarization" Process in the Writing of 19th-century Prince Edward Island History\*

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Volume 27, numéro 1, autumn 1997

URI : [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad27\\_1re01](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad27_1re01)

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Éditeur(s)

The Department of History at the University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0044-5851 (imprimé)

1712-7432 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce document

Hatvany, M. G. (1997). Tenant, Landlord and Historian:: A Thematic Review of the "Polarization" Process in the Writing of 19th-century Prince Edward Island History\*. *Acadiensis*, 27(1), 109–132.

## REVIEW ESSAYS/NOTES CRITIQUES

### Tenant, Landlord and Historian: A Thematic Review of the “Polarization” Process in the Writing of 19th-century Prince Edward Island History\*

IN SURVEYING THE HISTORIOGRAPHY DEALING WITH 19th-century Prince Edward Island, one cannot but be struck by the predominant focus on the politics of the land question during the colonial era. Following the Seven Years War, in 1767, British authorities divided virtually the entire Island into proprietary estates, establishing an Old World system of landlords and tenant farmers that persisted until 1875. In a continent where freehold tenure was perceived as the norm, the political agitation that emerged between landlords and tenants led to over a century of ongoing political struggles between farmers, who sought freehold tenure through an elected assembly, and a proprietary elite, who used high governmental influence in London to maintain the *status quo*.

So turbulent was the contest between these two groups that it led, in the 19th and 20th centuries, to the development of a “historiography of polarization” wherein the Island’s past was interpreted as dominated by “bad”, wealthy, absentee proprietors who neglected, while at the same time exploiting, their property and “good”, poor, egalitarian resident tenants whose progress was hamstrung by the burden of the leasehold system.<sup>1</sup> Virtually all other issues of the colonial period pale before the study of the agitation surrounding land tenure (what is commonly referred to as the “Land Question” in Island historiography) with few histories according even a limited analysis to the expansion of commerce, mercantile-capitalism and the rise of a middle class.<sup>2</sup> Until recently, the historiography of 19th-century Prince Edward Island has focused on the establishment of the proprietary system as the single impediment to common land ownership, and has fostered the view of a frequently isolated, undifferentiated rural society of self-sufficient tenant farmers in the one part, and landlords and high government officials in the other.<sup>3</sup>

\* In preparing this review, the author wishes to acknowledge the helpful comments of the anonymous reviewers for *Acadiensis*.

- 1 The word “polarized” is used here to denote a historiography concerned almost solely with two opposing classes — tenants and proprietors — to the neglect of other classes and socio-economic issues.
- 2 Regarding the lack of analysis of historical issues outside of tenant-landlord relations see M. Brook Taylor, *Promoters, Patriots, and Partisans: Historiography in Nineteenth-Century English Canada* (Toronto, 1989), p. 228; and J.M. Bumsted, “‘The Only Island There Is’: The Writing of Prince Edward Island History”, in Verner Smithers, David Milne and Satadal Dasgupta, eds., *The Garden Transformed: Prince Edward Island, 1945-1980* (Charlottetown, 1982), p. 20.
- 3 David Weale and Harry Baglione’s *The Island and Confederation: The End of An Era* (Summerside, 1973) is, to date, the most comprehensive social history of the Island. Nonetheless, it promotes the theme of a pre-industrial “golden age” of agrarian independence, self-sufficiency and egalitarianism among the entire farming population (pp. 79-81, 105-109), and fails to recognize that class stratification developed within an increasingly commercial farming economy. Bumsted remarks that “Although the...land question has obscured lines of class on the Island, its society in fact was highly structured and dominated by a clever and ambitious élite”, in “‘The Only Island There Is’”, p. 22.

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As an historical geographer of Prince Edward Island and the larger region of the pre-industrial “Northeastern Borderlands” of Canada and the United States, I found the neglect of such questions of social and economic development remarkable — especially when one considers the detailed studies of mercantilism, commercial development, staples economics, commodity production and modernity that exist for other regions of Atlantic Canada and Quebec, and that are so common immediately south of the international border, where such topics have dominated the historiography of early New England for the last 30 years.<sup>4</sup> While the “Land Question” is a well-known subject to Island writers — some have likened further discussion of it to “rehearsing a totally boring question” and “beating a dead horse”<sup>5</sup> — the polarization of early Island historiography around tenant-landlord relations, to the virtual neglect of other significant socio-economic issues, is an important historical process that is, as yet, little understood. In reviewing an article concerning the evolution of Prince Edward Island historiography to 1980, John Eldon Green asked: how is it that the writing of 19th-century Island history became centred so closely around issues of land tenure? Green declared: “It would [be]...helpful for an exploration of myths [the historic centrality of landlord-tenant relations] if we had achieved some understanding of why they have acquired such a powerful and important place in [Island historiography]”.<sup>6</sup>

In thematically tracing the chronological evolution of a polarized historiography in Prince Edward Island, this study seeks to explore those writings which contribute most to answering the momentous question posed by Green. It is appropriate to begin the discussion by analysing in detail the first historians of the Island — those who set the die that would be used time and again in constructing a polarized framework in the telling of Island history. As the primary focus on tenant-landlord relations emerged in Island history and was modified over time in response to social, economic and political circumstances, the analysis shifts to an examination of the work both of those scholars who accepted this interpretation and of those who eventually challenged it, in an attempt to determine why it has, in many respects, survived intact into the late 20th century. Certainly, useful studies examining various aspects of the development of Prince Edward Island’s historical writing already exist.<sup>7</sup> Yet no study has specifically analysed the reasons for the glaring absence of a “middle ground” (that is to say, work that examines socio-economic-political developments outside of the purview of landlord-tenant relations) in the writing of 19th-century Prince Edward Island history. The purpose of this thematic review, therefore, is to explore, through an examination

4 See for example Daniel Samson, ed., *Contested Countryside: Rural Workers and Modern Society in Atlantic Canada, 1800-1950* (Fredericton, 1994); Gordon S. Wood, “Inventing American Capitalism”, *The New York Times Review of Books*, 9 June 1994, pp. 44-9; and Serge Courville, “Villages and Agriculture in the Seigneuries of Lower Canada. Conditions of a Comprehensive Study of Rural Quebec in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century”, in Donald H. Akenson, ed., *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, V (Gananoque, 1986), pp. 121-49.

5 Anonymous comments received by the author during the review process for this article.

6 John Eldon Green, review of *The Garden Transformed: Prince Edward Island, 1945-1980*, in *The Island Magazine*, 12 (1982), pp. 30-1.

7 Ian Ross Robertson, “Recent Island History”, *Acadiensis*, IV, 2 (Spring 1975), pp. 111-18; Robertson, “Historical Writing on Prince Edward Island Since 1975”, *Acadiensis*, XVIII, 1 (Fall 1988), pp. 157-83; Bumsted, “The Only Island There Is”; and Taylor, *Promoters, Patriots, and Partisans*.

of some of the most notable and influential works, how the polarization of 19th-century Island historiography eventually became its dominant characteristic.

If the Island's 19th-century historiographic legacy were to be named, it might properly be dubbed the "Stewart Heritage" after Island writer, politician and proprietor John Stewart (1758-1834). In 1806, Stewart published a highly-influential history of the colony, entitled *An Account of Prince Edward Island*. As J.M. Bumsted writes, Stewart's book is probably the most quoted and cited in 19th-century Island literature, and had a tremendous impact on the development of Island historiography, and its subsequent polarization around tenant-landlord relations.<sup>8</sup> In asserting that the difficulties the Island experienced in its early development could be attributed mainly to "many of those into whose hands the property of the lands unfortunately fell [the proprietors], and not to any defect in the climate or soil", Stewart established the framework for "subsequent interpretations of the early British period".<sup>9</sup>

However, in relying on Stewart's assessment of early colonial development, later historians failed to recognize the middle-class<sup>10</sup> social and political biases that Stewart brought to his writing.<sup>11</sup> While Stewart's lengthy history was an eclectic examination of the Island's geography, climate, natural resources, settlement and government, the consistent theme throughout was the politics of land tenure and the detrimental impact negligent proprietors had on tenants and on the Island's development. As M. Brook Taylor points out, John Stewart's account was a black-and-white history of proprietors and their impact on settlement; "all other issues, whether internal or external, paled before this".<sup>12</sup>

In writing his account of the Island's history, Stewart masked the fact that his themes and arguments were coloured by self-interest. His aim was, foremost, to write a history that would serve his own middle-class social and economic aspirations. From the earliest days, the Stewart family was frequently immersed in Island politics. In the first 50 years of the colony members of the Stewart family held a number of

8 John Stewart, *An Account of Prince Edward Island, in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, North America* (London, 1806). See J.M. Bumsted's remarks concerning Stewart in "Historical Writing in English", in William Toye, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* (Toronto, 1983), pp. 350-51; and Boyde Beck, "The Fairest Land: Prince Edward Island in its Descriptive Literature, 1750-1860", *The Island Magazine*, 23 (1988), p. 20.

9 Stewart, *An Account of Prince Edward Island*, pp. iii, v. Few early Island histories refer to their sources, but elements of Stewart's thesis can easily be perceived in the works of later 19th-century Island histories. On the influence of Stewart's thesis as the basis of later accounts see Bumsted, "Historical Writing in English", p. 351; and Taylor, *Promoters, Patriots, and Partisans*, p. 79.

10 My use of middle class throughout this paper is applied to denote a gradation in society between the aristocracy (and high government officers) and the labouring majority. In Prince Edward Island, a middle class of merchants, land agents, barristers and prosperous farmers emerged over the course of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. See the definition provided by Tom Bottomore in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 74-7, 333-4.

11 See for instance George Sutherland's and Duncan Campbell's histories of Prince Edward Island. In relying on Stewart's interpretation, Sutherland judged John Stewart's book "valuable as a history, and creditable to [Stewart] as an author". Duncan Campbell considered Stewart's interpretation reliable "so far as facts are concerned". Sutherland, *A Manual of the Geography and Natural and Civil History of Prince Edward Island, for the Use of Schools, Families, and Emigrants* (Charlottetown, 1861), p. 114; Campbell, *History of Prince Edward Island* (Charlottetown, 1875), pp. 89-90.

12 Taylor, *Promoters, Patriots, and Partisans*, p. 228.

high government offices, including chief justice, receiver general of quit rents, acting clerk of the council and speaker of the House of Assembly, among others.<sup>13</sup>

The remuneration received from governmental service in a small colony was modest, and an ambitious middle-class family like the Stewarts soon recognized that the real opportunity for upward mobility on the Island lay in the control of land. When, because of numerous factors, including the outbreak of war between Britain and some of its American colonies, and later France, a number of proprietors failed to meet the obligations entailed in their land grants (most specifically the settlement of their estates and the payment of an annual quit rent — which was intended to help pay the salaries of the middle class officers like the Stewarts), the Stewarts were quick to endorse publicly the policy of escheating the delinquent estates.<sup>14</sup> Escheat, the legal term for reinvesting the title to forfeited land in the Crown for redistribution to new claimants, would provide the opportunity for minor, but well-placed, Island officials like the Stewart family to procure estates from the government at small expense.

To advance the cause of escheat and simultaneously create a base of political support for themselves among the tenantry, J.M. Bumsted argues, the Stewarts became active in stirring up public support among the rural population by encouraging the expectation that escheat would result in the radical redistribution of land to the Island's small tenant farmers.<sup>15</sup> In 1790 John and his brother, Charles Stewart, became members of the House of Assembly, chosen by voters in the countryside on the popularity of their escheat rhetoric. On the surface, the Stewarts held out to the rural electorate the possibility that escheat would lead to small freehold farms. But their true *modus operandi*, the evidence suggests, was to use popular support for escheat as a stratagem to depress land values and make it possible for themselves and other middle-class Island officials to buy whole estates for their own benefit.<sup>16</sup>

Regarding the Stewart strategy of publicly supporting escheat in the House of Assembly, M. Brook Taylor writes that John Stewart “had no intention of seriously compromising the proprietorial system from which he hoped to benefit”.<sup>17</sup> In the House of Assembly, Stewart appeared as a champion of the tenantry, yet behind the

13 Regarding the Stewart family's role in early Island history see J.M. Bumsted, “The Stewart Family and the Origins of Political Conflict on Prince Edward Island”, *The Island Magazine*, 9 (1981), pp. 12-18.

14 Three principal obligations were expected of recipients of land grants. One, an annual quit rent was payable to the Crown to support the Island's civil establishment; two, grantees were expected to settle one person for every 200 acres in each estate; and three, that all settlers be foreign Protestants from Europe, but not from within “His Majesty's Dominions”. While the third requirement was never seriously upheld, the failure of many proprietors to honour the first two conditions became the centre of escheat agitation. For further information regarding land grant obligations see “Land Grants in Prince Edward Island, 1767”, in *Report Concerning Canadian Archives For The Year 1905*, 1, 18 (Ottawa: 1906), pp. 3-11.

15 J.M. Bumsted, “The Loyal Electors of Prince Edward Island”, *The Island Magazine*, 8 (1980), p. 9; and see [Joseph Robinson], “To the Farmers in the Island of St. John” (c. 1796), 2702/684 Public Archives of Prince Edward Island [PARO].

16 Bumsted, “The Loyal Electors”, p. 15; J.M. Bumsted, “The Origins of the Land Question on Prince Edward Island, 1767-1805”, *Acadiensis*, XI, 1 (Fall 1981), p. 53.

17 Taylor, *Promoters, Patriots, and Partisans*, pp. 37, 38, 225.

scenes he was acting for the specific interests of himself and the “local island oligarchy”. His history of Prince Edward Island, then, was a book filled with many nuances — all of which served to support his official political persona. With the voice of a populist, the narrative that Stewart developed faulted, almost solely, negligent proprietors, who had failed to settle their estates and pay their annual quit rents, for the Island’s early developmental difficulties. More to the point, his thesis, which has frequently been misinterpreted when not cautiously read, was not that the leasehold system was to blame for initial disappointments, but that individual proprietors had caused distress by failing to meet their specific land grant obligations.<sup>18</sup>

The problem for later historians relying on Stewart’s interpretation is that he adopted a middle-class view so completely that he regarded proprietary rents as the only form of exploitation, the proprietary hierarchy as the only kind of class differentiation, and proprietary inaction as the only cause of economic retardation. His history focuses exclusively on landlords and settlement policy, and offers little comment regarding other socio-economic issues. A consideration of class stratification drawing distinctions among prospering, middling, and marginal farmers is absent. The role of merchant trade and credit in the Island’s development is missing, and so too is comment on the impact of fluctuating domestic and regional agricultural markets, crop failure, war, and the difficulties of frontier settlement for many immigrants who arrived without the significant capital assets necessary to properly establish a family farm.

John Stewart’s account of Prince Edward Island was written from first-hand knowledge, newspapers, and government documents and other official correspondence to which Stewart had access as Speaker of the House of Assembly. The historians who followed Stewart had few other additional sources to rely on.<sup>19</sup> Unfamiliar with the intricacies of turn-of-the-century politics and socio-economic conditions, later promoters and writers of Island history turned to Stewart’s text. They relied on his work as an accurate, faithful and comprehensive account, and adopted his outline and thesis as a framework from which to build. Over the course of time, therefore, Stewart’s biases and deliberate omissions became entrenched and were adapted to fit differing times and circumstances.<sup>20</sup>

The polarized image begun by Stewart and later continued by the middle-class promoters and writers of Prince Edward Island history was by nature exclusionary,

18 Stewart, *An Account of Prince Edward Island*, pp. iii, v, 173, 259, 262.

19 It must be remembered that no systematic preservation of primary historical resources such as merchant records, day books, diaries, or estate records and correspondence existed in 19th-century Prince Edward Island. Nor was official correspondence with the British colonial office accessible, as it remained in Great Britain until the 20th century, when it was repatriated by Canadian archivists.

20 For insight into the problems surrounding primary source material acquisition in early Prince Edward Island see Matthew G. Hatvany, “Demographer’s Delight: The ‘Lost’ DesBarres Census of 1810”, *The Island Magazine*, 39 (1996), pp. 10-11. On the nature and repatriation of colonial correspondence, see National Archives of Canada, *General Inventory of Manuscripts*, 2 (Ottawa: nd.), pp. 1-19; Phillip Buckner, “The Colonial Office and British North America, 1801-1850”, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography [DCB]*, VIII (Toronto, 1985), pp. xxiii-xxxvii; and Taylor, *Promoters, Patriots, and Partisans*, pp. 79, 225.



and frequently self-serving. Many socially-distinct groups that lay between marginal tenant farmers and elite proprietary landlords were overlooked, or worse, purposely discounted. The place and role of this middle class — merchants, land agents for absentee and resident proprietors, barristers, professionals and prosperous farmers — did not fit easily into the increasingly well-accepted framework of Island historiography. Their voices, except in a few fleeting instances, are conspicuously absent in the historical accounts of 19th-century Prince Edward Island.

This was an acceptable state of affairs for early Island writers and promoters, most of whom originated in the middle classes and were intent on downplaying or conveniently overlooking their class' responsibility in influencing the conditions of life for the Island's farm families.<sup>21</sup> At the time when Stewart was writing, and in the following decades, a number of "promotional" accounts of Prince Edward Island appeared. They were written by members of the Island's middle class — principally merchants, land agents, and other individuals who were dependent upon the proprietary system for employment and upward mobility.

Their interpretation of Island history was also polarized, but, unlike Stewart's account, they often de-emphasised the negative aspects of the proprietary system in order to entice immigrant farm families and other prospective clients to Prince Edward Island. One of the earliest of these works, which actually appeared prior to Stewart's publication, was John Cambridge's brief *A Description of Prince Edward Island* (1805).<sup>22</sup> Cambridge, an Island merchant and shipbuilder who used his profits to amass one of the Island's larger estates, dismissed the disadvantages of the leasehold tenure system in his narrative. His purpose in writing a history was to persuade readers that few obstacles stood in the path of prosperity for those immigrant families settling on Prince Edward Island.<sup>23</sup> By lauding the colony's environment and soil, and omitting most mitigating factors, Cambridge sought to entice prospective immigrants to the Island. Optimistically, Cambridge hoped such settlers would take passage in his ships, reside on his lands as tenants, patronize his mercantile stores and labour for his shipbuilding enterprises.<sup>24</sup>

John L. Lewellin had similar motives in presenting his account, *Emigration. Prince Edward Island*.<sup>25</sup> At the time of writing in the late 1820s, Lewellin was serving as land

21 Taylor, *Promoters, Patriots, and Partisans*, pp. 79, 83.

22 [John Cambridge], *A Description of Prince Edward Island* (London, 1805). A briefer version of this work appeared as *A Description of the Island of St. John, in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, North America* (London, c. 1798).

23 H.T. Holman, "Cambridge, John", *DCB*, VI, pp. 107-10. For additional insights into the mercantile affairs of Cambridge see John Bradley, *Letter-Books of John and Mary Cambridge of Prince Edward Island, 1792-1812* (Devizes, 1996).

24 For the local reaction to flagrant "promotional" histories see Philanthropist's (pseudonym) letter to the editor of the *Royal Gazette*, 22 November 1836 entitled "The Emigrant From England to P. E. Island". In this letter promotional histories are castigated for their omission of the many detrimental factors that settlers faced in a new colony. See also the similar comments written anonymously to the editor of the *European Magazine*, January 1819, in *Information to Emigrants. An Account of the Island of Prince Edward* (London, c.1820), pp. 10-25.

25 J.L. Lewellin, *Emigration. Prince Edward Island: A Brief But Faithful Account Of This Fine Colony* (Charlottetown, 1832), reprinted in D.C. Harvey, ed., *Journeys to the Island of St. John or Prince Edward Island, 1775-1832* (Toronto, 1955), pp. 180-213. See also H.T. Holman and Basil Greenhill, "Lewellin, John Lewellin", *DCB*, VIII, pp. 505-6.

agent for absentee landholders on the Island. As a middle-class land agent, one of Lewellin's objectives in composing his history was to attract British immigrants to the colony — some to the properties he oversaw. While his personal self-interest was similar to that of Cambridge, he was writing almost three decades later and his historical approach differed considerably.

By the late 1820s it was no longer possible for a self-interested writer to conveniently overlook, as Stewart and Cambridge had, the socio-economic difficulties that beset many of the colony's farm families. In seeking explanations for these difficulties, Lewellin admitted that neglect by a few proprietors had caused some initial setbacks, but he saved his harshest judgment for the British immigrants themselves. The Island, Lewellin wrote, was "inundated with the dregs of the poor houses of England, the lowest description of Irish, and the scum of Newfoundland".<sup>26</sup> How, he argued, could advancement be expected when

The general mode of conducting a Farm is slovenly, often wretched.... [and] few farms have any subdivision fences.... A like management in England would not give the Farmer bread and cheese.... If the Settlers wrought only three days in the week as they are obliged to do in the old country every day, they would obtain a sufficiency to supply their wants.<sup>27</sup>

The solution to these problems, Lewellin insisted, was to entice more intelligent, better-off, middling farmers from the British Isles to Prince Edward Island. The colony would prosper as a result of their "industry and sobriety", while they would reap the rewards of a "good poor man's country" where no land "in a ... similar climate will ... make a more grateful return for any labor or expense bestowed on its soil".<sup>28</sup>

In tracing the Island historiography to this point, it is important to recognize that all the authors were Island residents whose middle-class social and economic interests influenced their interpretations. It is instructive, therefore, to compare how three writers, without immediate financial interest in the Island, interpreted the social and economic history of the colony during the 1820s and early 1830s.

Walter Johnstone came to the Island from Scotland in 1820 and remained 18 months before returning to Europe. During that brief stay, he travelled over much of the Island as a missionary and collected information for two books intended for emigrants, *A Series of Letters Descriptive of Prince Edward Island*, and *Travels in Prince Edward Island*, which were published in 1822 and 1823.<sup>29</sup> The local details found in Johnstone's writings indicate that he was a perceptive observer of the daily experience of common Islanders. Yet more importantly, as an individual who, in his own words, had "neither intention nor interest in deceiving, as I have no lands upon

26 J.L.L. to the editor, *Royal Gazette*, 29 January 1833.

27 Lewellin, *Emigration. Prince Edward Island*, pp. 190-91, 193-94.

28 *Ibid.*, pp. 194, 199.

29 Walter Johnstone, *A Series of Letters Descriptive of Prince Edward Island* (Dumfries, 1822), in Harvey, *Journeys to the Island of St. John*, pp. 86-161; Walter Johnstone, *Travels in Prince Edward Island, Gulf of St. Lawrence, North-America, In The Years 1820-1821* (Edinburgh, 1823); Bumsted, "Johnstone, Walter", *DCB*, VI, pp. 361-62.



the Island to sell or let”, his writings appear to be an unbiased account of life on early Prince Edward Island.<sup>30</sup> One of Johnstone’s most salient points, made throughout his writings, concerned the economically stratified nature of the Island’s rural society. Both poverty and prosperity existed across the Island’s countryside, Johnstone argued, not as a result of the burden of the rental system — which he personally considered slight — but as a natural result of such factors as the amount of capital possessed by immigrants upon arrival, place of settlement, length of settlement and fluctuating market demands for agricultural produce.<sup>31</sup>

The need for capital to establish a farm was imperative to the settling family, Johnstone cautioned prospective settlers. Emigrants without adequate capital, he continued, “cannot succeed well there for sometime...”.<sup>32</sup> Settlement was a complex affair wrought with hardship and incessant work, yet for the newly-arrived family possessed of adequate capital and industry, Johnstone believed, the Island offered ample opportunity to attain “comparative comfort and independence”.<sup>33</sup>

In 1831 Joseph Bouchette, a military surveyor from Quebec who travelled over much of the northern half of the continent, provided a brief summary of Prince Edward Island’s history in his wide-ranging *The British Dominions in North America*.<sup>34</sup> During his brief stay of only a few months on the Island, Bouchette found little to distinguish Prince Edward Island from the other colonies he had visited, especially the presence of a well-entrenched middle class:

Society, which has here advanced rapidly, is not distinguished from the society in the other colonies by any peculiar features, and its different classes are very similarly divided....Members of the council, the employes [sic] of government, the superior classes of the military, merchants, and traders of all sorts, who have attained a tolerable degree of affluence, constitute here an upper class....[while] the farmers and husbandmen comprise every class.<sup>35</sup>

Like Johnstone, as a visitor to the Island, Bouchette’s observations are significant because they provide a strikingly different picture of the colony’s society from the Islanders’ own interpretations. Bouchette was the first to comment clearly on the development of lines of class interest that went beyond tenants and landlords, and his observations are not coloured by immediate self-interest. His chapter on Prince Edward Island says little about the influence of proprietors, and he implies that the experience of Islanders, in terms of opportunities, obstacles and society, was very similar to that of settlers in colonies where freehold tenure existed. John McGregor, a contemporary of Bouchette, published a study of British America one year later,

30 Johnstone, *Letters Descriptive of Prince Edward Island*, p. 144.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 111-13, 126, 132-33, 157.

32 *Ibid.*, pp. 143-44.

33 *Ibid.*, pp. 139, 147-49.

34 Joseph Bouchette, *The British Dominions in North America*, II (London, 1831); Claude Boudreau and Pierre Lépine, “Bouchette, Joseph”, *DCB*, VII (1988), pp. 95-8.

35 Bouchette, *The British Dominions*, pp. 176-77.

entitled, appropriately enough, *British America* (1832).<sup>36</sup> Similar to Bouchette's interpretation, McGregor's lengthy description of the history and development of Prince Edward Island did not overlook the existence of an influential middle class. In fact, McGregor went far beyond Bouchette or Johnstone in providing readers with a highly detailed portrayal of the stratified nature of the Island's socio-economic development.

McGregor was able to render a sophisticated analysis of the colony's development because of a lengthy residence on the Island. For slightly more than a decade, beginning with the immigration of his family to the Island around 1806, McGregor lived and worked on his parent's Island farm on Lot 34. Quitting the farm as a young adult, he became a merchant, land agent, and eventually was appointed high sheriff of the colony in 1822.<sup>37</sup> As the Sheriff, McGregor was constantly involved in the political struggles among proprietors, government and tenants. A highly inflammatory political dispute in which he supported certain proprietors and tenants against the Governor, coupled with his failure to achieve success as a merchant, led McGregor to sever his ties with the colony and immigrate to Britain in the mid-1820s. There he became a successful politician and writer of history and economics. Because of his familiarity with Prince Edward Island, the colony received considerable attention in his subsequent writings on British North America.

Unlike Johnstone and Bouchette, McGregor was hardly an "outsider" in terms of his previous residence and involvement in Island politics. Yet, liberated from the inhibitions and self-interest that permanent residence imposed on writers of Island history, he was able to devote a considerable amount of space to writing about the role of the middle class — in this case the merchant — in influencing the Island's social and economic development. McGregor contended that the proprietary system was not an odious obstacle to socio-economic development. The system, he wrote, provided capital-poor immigrants with the opportunity to settle without the pressure of immediately possessing a substantial down payment for land, as was often the case where freehold tenure prevailed.<sup>38</sup> One of the foremost impediments the settlers faced, McGregor argued from his own first-hand knowledge, was the exploitative and litigious nature of the relationship between many of the Island's merchants and farmers:

A system ruinous to the cultivators of the soil [is the]....systematic business to sell rum, tobacco, tea, and various articles, on credit to the farmer, at enormous advances, which for some years swallowed up the whole fruits of his industry, leaving but a bare subsistence for his family....At length shopkeepers multiplied, and the system of selling goods to the farmers on credit rather increased than decreased...and farmers, especially after the

36 John M'Gregor, *British America*, I (Edinburgh, 1832). This volume was preceded by an earlier work by McGregor entitled *Historical and Descriptive Sketches of the Maritime Colonies of British America* (London, 1828). McGregor's *British America* has been relied on here for its fuller treatment of Prince Edward Island.

37 J.M. Bumsted, "MacGregor, John", *DCB*, VII, pp. 547-49.

38 M'Gregor, *British America*, pp. 349-50.

[Napoleonic] war, could not pay them. A list of debts was accordingly made out by the shopkeeper, and...given to a magistrate to sue for immediately, while the rest were probably given to an attorney to recover.<sup>39</sup>

Lack of adequate specie, exploitative merchant credit, excessive litigation and insufficient export markets for the Island's agricultural goods, McGregor wrote, were all significant impediments to the Island's development. Overcoming these obstacles, he implied, would lead to the prosperity and progress so much desired by the Island's farm families.<sup>40</sup>

The latter half of the 1830s represents an important juncture in the writing of Prince Edward Island history. Just as broader, less self-interested interpretations were beginning to challenge the simplistic polarized view of Island history, a number of adverse economic and social circumstances coincided to impede the development of the Island's rural society. These social and economic disruptions acted to prevent further development of views such as those of Johnstone, Bouchette and McGregor, and instead firmly fixed popular blame for the Island's difficulties solely on the burden of the leasehold tenure system on the tenantry.

During the mid-1830s through the early 1840s, the Island suffered an inordinate number of crop failures, a severe slump in the shipbuilding and timber industries, and a decrease in trade with Britain. The number of destitute immigrants leaving Britain for the Island peaked during this period, and by the 1830s much of the best frontlands in the colony had already been settled. As a result of the economic distress, religious millenarianism flourished on the Island at this time, while the 1830s also saw a radical new element added to colonial politics when Catholics, many of them poor and recent Scottish and Irish immigrants, received the franchise for the first time. The combination of these factors, all transpiring at nearly the same time, resulted in a radical shift in Island politics.<sup>41</sup>

What emerged from the economic crisis that began in the late 1820s was the Escheat Party. A "populist" political movement, Escheat relied on social and economic distress in the countryside to generate support for its single ideological goal of confiscating the land of the proprietors and re-granting it to the tenantry as a means of ameliorating the distress of their economic situation.<sup>42</sup> The Escheat Party, which gained control of the House of Assembly in 1838, virtually ignored internal economic problems which could not easily be resolved, and focused the collective anxiety of the tenantry against the external power of the landlords. Virtually all of the Island's developmental problems were blamed on the proprietary system. It was a powerful ideology that effectively polarized Island politics around the single issue of tenant-landlord relations.

39 *Ibid.*, pp. 335-37.

40 *Ibid.*, pp. 338, 345, 366.

41 For a full treatment of these socio-economic issues see Matthew G. Hatvany, "Tenant, Landlord, and the New Middle Class: Settlement, Society, and Economy in Early Prince Edward Island, 1798-1848", Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maine, 1996.

42 For an analysis of the Escheat movement see Rusty Bittermann, "Escheat! Rural Protest on Prince Edward Island, 1832-1842", Ph.D. dissertation, University of New Brunswick, 1991; Harry Baglole, "Cooper, William", *DCB*, IX, pp. 155-58; Weale and Baglole, *The Island and Confederation*, pp. 59-60; and Hatvany, "Tenant, Landlord, and the New Middle Class", pp. 299-350.

The economic urgency which brought the Escheat Party to power in Prince Edward Island was felt throughout British North America. The crisis led to rebellions in Upper and Lower Canada and a subsequent investigation into the troubles by British authorities. The result of the inquiry was the highly influential report by Lord Durham on socio-economic conditions in all of British North America. While Lord Durham never personally visited Prince Edward Island, his findings for the colony are of particular interest, since they vividly illustrate the impact that the Escheat Party had on the future interpretation of Island history. In his report on the affairs of British North America, Durham noted that the economic crisis of the 1830s had led in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick to “an aspect of poverty, backwardness and stagnation”.<sup>43</sup> Durham’s assessment of the economic situation on Prince Edward Island was quite similar. Yet, influenced by leaders of the Escheat Movement and members of the Island’s cadre of middle-class office holders on whom his report relied heavily for information regarding the colony’s circumstances, he came to a different conclusion as to the cause of Prince Edward Island’s distress.<sup>44</sup> He ascribed the poverty and difficulties on the Island not to the ongoing economic crisis, but to the proprietary system:

Its past and present disorders are but the sad results of that fatal error which stifled its prosperity in the very cradle of its existence....No one can mistake the cause of this lamentable waste....it is the possession of almost the whole soil of the island by absentee proprietors....Had its natural advantages been turned to proper account, it might at this time have been the granary of the British Colonies.<sup>45</sup>

By attributing the Island’s difficulties solely to the proprietary system, Durham’s report, like John Stewart’s earlier interpretation, played an influential role in leading later historians to overlook other socio-economic factors in condemning the proprietary system as a whole.<sup>46</sup> Given Durham’s well-known zeal for political reform, it is not surprising that he almost completely adopted the point of view of the middle-class office holders and the political representatives of the tenantry. This lack of “objectivity” on Durham’s part and his consequent failure to examine “all” the

43 Charles Lucas, ed., *Lord Durham’s Report On The Affairs Of British North America*, II (New York, reprint 1970), pp. 200-1, 240.

44 See W. Ross Livingston’s comments about the influence of Escheat on Durham’s interpretation of the Island’s socio-economic development in *Responsible Government in Prince Edward Island: A Triumph of Self-Government Under the Crown* (Iowa City, 1931), pp. 12-3. For a similar interpretation see Harry Baglole, “A Reassessment of the Role of Absentee Proprietors in Prince Edward Island History”, unpublished Graduate paper, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1970, pp. 3-4, copy in possession of the author.

45 Lucas, *Lord Durham’s Report*, pp. 198-99.

46 For an example of the influence of Durham’s report on later Island historians see Frank MacKinnon, *The Government of Prince Edward Island* (Toronto, 1951), p. 116. MacKinnon relies on Durham’s findings as accurate and objective, and writes: “Lord Durham’s report contained one of the best analyses [of the Island’s circumstances] by an independent observer”. Yet MacKinnon overlooks the fact that Durham did not visit the Island, and on many points appears to have accepted uncritically the evidence provided to him by members of the Escheat movement.

factors that led to discontent in Prince Edward Island during the 1830s were the chief complaints of Island proprietor Robert Stewart.<sup>47</sup> In a lengthy pamphlet published in 1839 on the heels of the Durham Report, Stewart criticized Durham for relying completely on “*ex parte* statements” made by the leaders of the Escheat movement. Many of the problems besetting the colony, Stewart argued, were also prevalent in the neighbouring provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. And, Stewart repeatedly emphasized, many of the allegations of economic retardation blamed on the proprietary system were groundless. The rhetoric against the proprietary system was, in his opinion, the work of demagogues interested solely in agitating the rural populace for their own political goals.<sup>48</sup> Unfortunately for Stewart, his pro-proprietary condemnation of Durham’s report was never adequately addressed by later historians.<sup>49</sup> Within a short time his pamphlet slipped into obscurity.

In 1861 Cornelius Birch Bagster, a resident of the Island, published *The Progress and Prospects of Prince Edward Island*.<sup>50</sup> His interpretation is noteworthy because, like many of the writers of the 1820s and early 1830s, he was writing the book for the use of future immigrants and thus he did not solely fault the proprietary system for the Island’s early difficulties. Such troubles, he wrote, were only natural in a young and developing colony. Had he provided additional substance for this assertion, he might have furthered the interpretations that Johnstone, Bouchette and McGregor had begun earlier. Instead, he offered a running political commentary of the annual activities of the Island’s assemblies, leaving unexamined the social and economic factors that might have challenged the increasingly accepted polarized view of Island history.

Another historian, writing in 1875 on the eve of the government dissolution of the leasehold tenure structure in Prince Edward Island, Duncan Campbell found it expedient to focus on providing his readership — the Island’s farm families and future immigrants — with a political history of the struggle to rid the province of the proprietary system and provide the Island’s rural population with freehold tenure. “It was necessary”, Campbell wrote in the preface to his *History of Prince Edward Island*, “that a considerable portion of this work should deal with the Land Question”. Relying on the writings of John Stewart, Lord Durham’s report and numerous documents from the era of the Escheat movement, Campbell’s analysis of the Island’s development reiterated the old interpretation, rehearsing the story of the conflict between tenants and landlords, while omitting other issues involving class and economic conditions.<sup>51</sup>

The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw a number of learned articles and books

47 [Robert Stewart], *Facts Versus Lord Durham. Remarks Upon That Portion Of The Earl of Durham’s Report, Relating to Prince Edward Island, Shewing The Fallacy of the Statements Contained Therein* (London, 1839). There is no family relationship between Robert Stewart and the earlier historian John Stewart.

48 *Ibid.*, pp. 4-9, 12.

49 See for instance Sutherland, *A Manual of the Geography and Natural and Civil History of Prince Edward Island*, which does not examine Stewart’s assertions, even though the book purports to be a history of the “great land question”, p. iv.

50 C. Birch Bagster, *The Progress and Prospects of Prince Edward Island, Written during the Leisure of a Visit in 1861* (Charlottetown, 1861).

51 Campbell, *History of Prince Edward Island*, pp. 89-90. See also, Shirley B. Elliott, “Campbell, Duncan”, *DCB*, XI (1982), pp. 147-48; and Taylor, *Promoters, Patriots, and Partisans*, p. 228.

appear about the early history of Prince Edward Island, many of them as a result of the incorporation of an historical society in 1882 and the launching of *The Prince Edward Island Magazine* in 1899.<sup>52</sup> Some of these works, like George Alley's "Prince Edward Island 100 Years Ago", relied on newly-found "non-political" source materials and oral and written interviews of the Island's oldest inhabitants. Such innovative research methods into non-political sources, as might be expected, provided new insights into the social issues and agents of development in early Prince Edward Island. Yet because of the antiquarian nature of many of these writings, none ever developed an interpretation sophisticated enough to challenge the polarized pattern of Island historiography.<sup>53</sup>

By this stage in the development of the province's historiography, the focus on "tenant-landlord relations" had become its predominant attribute. Writing in 1913 about Prince Edward Island's past for the multi-volume *Canada and Its Provinces*, Andrew Macphail commented that there was little more to be written about the province's early years — they were dominated by the proprietary system, and the history of that system had been completely exhausted:

Upon certain questions, like that of the relation between landlord and tenant...nothing now remains to be said....It affected the fate of the people in the minutest detail. It governed industry and directed social life. All writers made it their theme, and the accounts they give...deal with the interests of the proprietors or with those of the tenants.<sup>54</sup>

An over reliance on the polarized precedent set first by Stewart, and later reinforced and adapted by Durham and Campbell, led even an intellectual like Macphail, who keenly appreciated the social and economic complexity of rural life, to ignore that complexity in writing about the province's historical development.<sup>55</sup> For Macphail, it was enough to write that the colony's settlers had achieved self-sufficiency by 1792. Living in a state of almost idyllic isolation thereafter, he implied, the Island's settlers found prosperity and contentment, hampered only by the burden of the proprietary system.<sup>56</sup>

There was nothing new about Macphail's omissions. Yet in his generalizations regarding the Island's self-sufficiency, egalitarian social structure among tenants,

52 Taylor, *Promoters, Patriots, and Partisans*, p. 227; H.T. Holman, "The Prince Edward Island Magazine", *The Island Magazine* 2 (1977), pp. 18-19.

53 George Alley, "Prince Edward Island 100 Years Ago", unpublished manuscript, c. 1880, 2541/76, PARO; D. Currie, questionnaire circulated in 1876 to the oldest inhabitants of the Island, 2702/299-316, PARO; A.B. Warburton, *A History of Prince Edward Island From Its Discovery in 1534 Until the Departure of Lieutenant Governor Ready in A.D. 1831* (St. John, 1923); and W.L. Cotton, *Chapters in Our Island Story* (Charlottetown, 1927).

54 Andrew Macphail, "The History of Prince Edward Island", in Adam Shortt and Arthur G. Doughty, eds., *Canada and Its Provinces: A History of the Canadian People and Their Institutions by One Hundred Associates*, XIII (Toronto, 1913), pp. 305, 363.

55 Regarding Macphail's understanding of the complexity of the socio-economy of rural Prince Edward Island see his semi-autobiographical *The Master's Wife*, introduced by Ian Ross Robertson (Charlottetown, reprint 1994).

56 Macphail, "The History of Prince Edward Island", pp. 360, 365.



isolation, prosperity and contentment, a new component, the era of the “Golden Age” prior to Confederation, was added to the polarized framework of Island historiography. For over a century Island historians had blamed the proprietary system for the developmental ills of the colony. When economic problems continued to beset the province (in fact the entire Maritime region) in the period of industrialization following Confederation and the dissolution of the leasehold tenure system, discontented Islanders like Macphail began turning to the past for consolation.

Macphail’s comments about the Island’s pre-industrial isolation, self-sufficiency, prosperity and contentment owed more to nostalgia than to fact. It was, as modern researchers studying this psychological phenomenon point out for another part of the Maritimes, “a highly selective view of the past to satisfy present needs”.<sup>57</sup> As the economic situation of Atlantic Canada continued to fall behind that of the central Canadian provinces, Maritime historians began looking to the past for a “Golden Age” when times were simpler and better. In creating a golden age of egalitarian (that is to say, classless) farmers and independent petty producers, a new historical framework developed that adapted and — at a much later date, as we will see — continued the old pattern of polarization.<sup>58</sup> Especially in the later half of the 20th century, exploitative proprietors were replaced by an inattentive federal government as the explanation for the Island’s difficulties and failure to reach its perceived potential in the post-Confederation and post-leasehold tenure era.<sup>59</sup>

During the 1930s, as national histories began focussing on the theme of the emergence of responsible government in its Canadian context, a third historical framework — the evolution of responsible government on the Island — was incorporated into the historiography with the publication of W. Ross Livingston’s *Responsible Government in Prince Edward Island: A Triumph of Self-Government Under the Crown* (1931).<sup>60</sup> In tracing the development of responsible government, Livingston provided a sophisticated analysis of the processes of political change and the political struggles over land control on the Island, but added nothing new to the history of socio-economy. In his 1951 study, *The Government of Prince Edward Island*, Frank MacKinnon relied on past polarized accounts, especially Lord Durham’s report, to argue that the Island’s development “was retarded ... by the land question”.<sup>61</sup> Yet for MacKinnon the central aspect of Prince Edward Island’s early development was not the land question itself but the struggle of the popularly-elected assembly to gain the political authority to deal decisively with this issue.<sup>62</sup> Political battles fought between representatives of the tenantry and the proprietary hierarchy

57 Rusty Bittermann, Robert A. MacKinnon and Graeme Wynn, “Of Inequality and Interdependence in the Nova Scotian Countryside, 1850-70”, *Canadian Historical Review*, LXXIV, 1 (March 1993), p. 41.

58 See R. James Sacouman’s critique of the lack of class analysis by Maritime historians studying the pre-Confederation era in “Semi-proletarianization and Rural Underdevelopment in the Maritimes”, *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 17, 3 (1980), p. 233.

59 Taylor, *Promoters, Patriots, and Partisans*, p. 229; Samson, *Contested Countryside*, pp. 26, 267.

60 Livingston, *Responsible Government in Prince Edward Island*; see also the comments by Carl Berger about the national trend in studying the evolution of responsible government in *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing Since 1900*, 2nd ed. (Toronto, 1988), pp. 32-53.

61 MacKinnon, *The Government of Prince Edward Island*, p. 105.

62 *Ibid.*, pp. 105-19.

dominate his account, and no consideration of mercantile-capitalist development or adverse socio-economic factors was included in the analysis.

As long as the study of Prince Edward Island remained focussed on specific issues — the land question, the impact of Confederation and the evolution of responsible government — little attention was paid to the everyday factors that affected the well-being of the Island's 19th-century majority. A different framework was needed in order to move beyond the polarized pattern of Island historiography. Such a novel approach was provided by Andrew Hill Clark in his 1959 historical geography *Three Centuries and the Island*.<sup>63</sup> Clark's work was a clear break with past historiography because of its geographic organization. As an historical geographer, Clark's ambition did not rest in presenting a standard narrative of the Island's history. Instead, his goal was to detail the temporal and spatial changes of the Island's physical and human landscape over a succession of eras. To do so, Clark mined the archives of the Island and other repositories to a far greater degree than any historian before him. His completed work contained a phenomenal 155 maps demonstrating the patterns and changes in social, economic and cultural relationships between various groups among the Island's inhabitants, and between the people and the land.<sup>64</sup>

The wealth of descriptive information regarding the relationship between people and place embodied in Clark's study illustrated a rural milieu far more complex than any previous history of the Island had intimated.<sup>65</sup> In his "Review and Conclusions", Clark wrote that his data "make us less ready to accept unquestionably the popular belief...that tenancy almost automatically worked against good farming practices....There are...contrary indications".<sup>66</sup> Clark had fractured the polarized interpretation of Island history, yet he never expounded upon the tremendous implications that his assertion held for Island historiography.<sup>67</sup>

Writing less than a decade after Clark, in 1967, British historians Basil Greenhill and Ann Giffard published *Westcountrymen in Prince Edward's Isle: A Fragment of the Great Migration*, a history of the relationship between western England and Prince Edward Island in the 19th-century shipbuilding and timber industries.<sup>68</sup> In analyzing the cyclical growth, evolution and significance of these two industries to the inhabitants of Prince Edward Island, Greenhill and Giffard brought a new approach to the study of early Island history which served to further break down the polarized

63 Andrew Hill Clark, *Three Centuries and the Island: An Historical Geography of Settlement and Agriculture in Prince Edward Island, Canada* (Toronto, 1959).

64 D.W. Meinig, "Prologue: Andrew Hill Clark, Historical Geographer", in James R. Gibson, *European Settlement and Development in North America: Essays on Geographical Change in Honour and Memory of Andrew Hill Clark* (Toronto, 1978), p. 8; regarding Clark's amassing of archival materials see Andrew Hill Clark, "First Things First", in Ralph E. Ehrenberg, ed., *Patterns and Process: Research in Historical Geography* (Washington, 1975), pp. 9-21.

65 See for instance *Three Centuries and the Island*, p. 91, where Clark intimates that the well-being of early farm families was determined, not by the proprietary system alone, but by timing and place of settlement.

66 *Ibid.*, p. 214.

67 Bumsted, "'The Only Island There Is'", p. 20.

68 Basil Greenhill and Ann Giffard, *Westcountrymen in Prince Edward's Isle: A Fragment of the Great Migration* (Toronto, 1967).

view of Island historiography. The exploitative role of the timber and shipping merchant, the economic impact of fluctuating shipbuilding and timber markets, the highly stratified nature of the rural economy and the hegemonic power of the emerging middle class were all brilliantly illustrated in this case study of the Island's timber and shipbuilding industries.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, Greenhill and Giffard, like Clark before them, failed to expound upon the implications of their conclusions in regard to the broader context of understanding the Island's early history. As a result of this deficiency, the significance of their findings to the development of Island historiography went unrecognized, for the most part, by the historians who would immediately follow them.

During the 1970s the writing of Island history was heavily influenced by the centennial celebrations of the Island's entry into Confederation in 1873, and by the emergence of social history as a prominent theme in the writing of national and regional history.<sup>70</sup> In 1973 F. W. P. Bolger's (editor) narrative, *Canada's Smallest Province: A History of Prince Edward Island*, was published by the province's centennial commission.<sup>71</sup> While now outdated, the book remains the most comprehensive attempt to document the history of Prince Edward Island from the pre-historic to the modern age. The work especially concentrates on fleshing out the pre-Confederation British era. But although ambitious, the volume is not without limitations, chiefly its failure to build on the work of Clark and Greenhill and Giffard, and the results of contemporary scholarship at that time dealing with rural class formation and mercantile-capitalist development in colonial North America.<sup>72</sup>

In the tradition of the constitutional historians, such as Donald Creighton and P.B. Waite, under whom he studied and with whom he was associated in his early career, Bolger (one of the primary contributors to the work) saw the Island's early history in terms of the evolution of responsible government leading into Canadian Confederation.<sup>73</sup> At the centre of the narrative was the conflict over political power between the proprietary elite and the political representatives of the tenantry. Based largely on an examination of the Colonial Office papers, the chapters by Bolger and other contributors, specifically W.S. MacNutt, provide little analysis of the socio-economic conditions of the tenantry, while the rise of an influential middle class receives no mention whatsoever.<sup>74</sup>

In the same year that Bolger's work appeared, David Weale and Harry Baglole

69 *Ibid.*, pp. 40, 84, 132, 135, 143, 145, 151-52, 166.

70 Robertson, "Recent Island History", p. 111; Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History*, p. 287.

71 F.W.P. Bolger, ed., *Canada's Smallest Province: A History of Prince Edward Island* (Charlottetown, 1973).

72 In his review of Island history, Robertson critiques *Canada's Smallest Province* remarking that "Without exception the focus is upon relations between the governors and their superiors in London. The Islanders themselves scarcely intrude", in "Recent Island History", p. 111.

73 Bolger's career is sketched in the *UPEI Magazine*, 9, 1 (1996), p. 16; and see also the prefatory comments in Reverend Francis W.P. Bolger, *Prince Edward Island and Confederation, 1863-1873* (Charlottetown, 1964), pp. v-vi.

74 For instance, the critical role of merchants in the Island's development is never mentioned. This is a surprising omission, especially since at the University of Toronto Bolger studied under Donald Creighton whose renowned *The Empire of the St. Lawrence* (Toronto, 1956) emphasized the role of mercantile interests in the development of Canada. It can, perhaps, be explained, however, by his heavy reliance on the Colonial Office papers, which focus primarily on government relations. See Bittermann's comments in "Escheat!", p. 15.

published *The Island and Confederation: The End of an Era*, a social history of the Island intended as an historical consciousness raiser and an animadversion of the events surrounding the centennial celebrations.<sup>75</sup> The book was deliberately polemical, and was organized to illustrate what the authors saw as the adverse ramifications that union with Canada had on the political and economic independence of Island society. In supporting their thesis, Weale and Baglole, like Macphail before them, developed the perception of a “golden age” of self-sufficiency, independence and egalitarianism among farm families in pre-Confederation Prince Edward Island. The view of such a high degree of consensus in early Prince Edward Island is arguably overextended, especially considering that, setting aside the political agitation for escheat, there was probably never another time in Island history when there was so little consensus and so much divisiveness in regards to language, ethnicity, religion and class stratification.<sup>76</sup>

According to Weale and Baglole’s interpretation, the early history of Prince Edward Island was a simple linear progression from wilderness settlement to “golden age” of isolation, self-sufficiency, independence and consensus by the mid-19th century. In this narrative, the cyclical fluctuations of the regional and international markets in agriculture, timber and shipping are ignored for the period before 1854 (the beginning of trade reciprocity with the United States), the tenantry is treated as a homogeneous body without differentiation, and the rise of an influential middle class is not mentioned. Only the proprietary system, it is implied, prevented the Island from becoming an isolated “arcadia” of self-sufficient yeoman farm families in the era before Confederation.<sup>77</sup>

As the first attempt to write a social history of early Prince Edward Island, the book received notable interest and sold over 3,000 copies before going out of print in 1979. And it has had a significant influence on both the academic and amateur historical communities on the Island.<sup>78</sup> Whether cited directly or not, Weale’s and Baglole’s “golden age” thesis regarding the isolation, self-sufficiency and egalitarian nature of pre-Confederation Prince Edward Island society, restricted only by the encumbrance of the proprietary system, is implicit in many of the popular histories, and in much of

75 Weale and Baglole, *The Island and Confederation*. For insight into the motivations behind this publication see “Why is This Man Smiling?”, in Harry Baglole and David Weale, eds., *Cornelius Howatt: Superstar!* (Summerside, 1974), pp. 12-19.

76 Weale and Baglole label an entire chapter dealing with the decades immediately before Confederation as “The Golden Age”, in *The Island and Confederation*, pp. 79-98. See Bumsted’s comments regarding the dangers of developing “mythical” “golden ages” in ““The Only Island There Is””, pp. 27-8.

77 See “A Farm of One’s Own”, in Weale and Baglole, *The Island and Confederation*, pp. 51-69. The authors comment that by 1830 the number of “freeholders increased agonizingly slow”, yet the census of 1833 indicates that virtually one-third of all holders of land on the Island were freeholders in that year. Obviously, Island society was much more stratified than Weale and Baglole recognized. This problem of interpretation is not unique to the Island’s proprietary system, but is also found in relatively recent studies of the seigneurial system of Quebec. See Catherine Desbarats, “Agriculture Within the Seigneurial Régime of Eighteenth-Century Canada: Some Thoughts on the Recent Literature”, *Canadian Historical Review*, LXIII, 1 (1992), 1-29.

78 Between 1973 and 1988 approximately 75 antiquarian histories were written about Island towns, villages, and families. Robertson, “Historical Writing Since 1975”, p. 158.

the poetry and folk music about the Island to appear since 1973.<sup>79</sup>

Ironically, in the early and latter 1970s it was Harry Baglole who anticipated the development of a more complex understanding of the land question and early Island history.<sup>80</sup> In 1970 and 1971, as a graduate student at Memorial University of Newfoundland, Baglole wrote two influential papers on reassessing both the origins of the land question and the role of absentee proprietors in the Island's early development. In these studies Baglole insisted that Island historians had developed a "conspiracy theory of history" regarding the adverse role of the proprietary system. He argued that to understand the early problems besetting the colony, one had to examine not only the tensions between tenant and landlord, but how these tensions influenced the writing of Island history. His most significant contribution was in examining the heretofore unexplored role of the Island's middle-class government office holders. These officials, Baglole wrote, often initiated and capitalized on conflict between tenants and landlords for their own personal benefit.<sup>81</sup>

Baglole's novel interpretation was a turning-point in the historiography, as a new generation of historians began to build on the questions asked in these papers, which, in turn, began to reveal the overlooked complexity of Island history.<sup>82</sup> Yet Baglole did not pursue these new themes, but instead became intensely involved in the political and cultural movements of the early 1970s to raise historical consciousness and assert local control over the Island's future development.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, during the mid and

79 For a brief example of a much larger trend, following the publication of Weale and Baglole's *The Island and Confederation*, to view the rural society of pre-Confederation Prince Edward Island as isolated, egalitarian and self-sufficient, frustrated only by the problems of the Land Question, see Errol Sharpe, *A People's History of Prince Edward Island* (Toronto, 1976); Milton Acorn's poetry based on Island history in his *The Island Means Minago* (Toronto, 1975); Reg Phelan, "P.E.I. Land Struggle", *Cooper Review* (Charlottetown, 1988), pp. 21-31; and the folksong lyrics in "Land for the Tiller", in Lisa Doyle's *Stowaway* (Belfast: Bedlam Records, 1993). All present a polarized view of early Island history that virtually ignores the rise of an influential middle class, or the considerable class-conflict that existed between poor and prospering farm families and other non-political elites.

80 Like Baglole, David Weale's writings in the later half of the 1970s also developed a complex interpretation of early Island history outside of the purview of the Land Question. His Ph.D. thesis, "The Ministry of the Reverend Donald McDonald", Queen's University, 1976, examined the "great religious awakening" that took place on the Island between 1830 and 1860. In this study, Weale argues that the attempt by immigrants to build a new society and future in the wilderness of Prince Edward Island was physically and emotionally traumatic and led to a mass psychological response of gloom and despair. Unfortunately, neither Weale nor other researchers have made serious use of the findings of this thesis, especially as they relate to the tenants' response to the proprietary system during the 1830s and 1840s.

81 Baglole, "A Reassessment of the Role of Absentee Proprietors" (1970); and "The Origins of the Prince Edward Island Land Question", unpublished Graduate paper, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1971, 3702, PARO.

82 A close reading of Baglole's "The Origins of the Prince Edward Island Land Question" indicates that the author realized leasehold tenure was not unique to the Island, p. 1; that Durham's report was biased, pp. 3-4; that Islanders had developed a "conspiracy theory of history" leaving many questions unanswered regarding the proprietary system, p. 5; that some proprietors had invested heavily in their Island lands in an attempt to fulfil their obligations, p. 12; and that the commercial classes (i.e., merchants) were intimately connected with the proprietary system, pp. 15-16.

83 During this period Baglole was involved in the early development of the Island's Heritage Foundation, and he and David Weale were intimately involved with the Brothers and Sisters of Cornelius Howatt

late 1970s Baglole did publish three separate works which gave readers a hint of the complexity of the province's early socio-economic development.<sup>84</sup> In 1975 he compiled and edited a study kit on the land question for the Island's Department of Education, and in 1977 he published a guide to the historical resources of the Island. In compiling and commenting on the primary sources available for studying early Island history, Baglole intimated that there were many unanswered questions regarding the socio-economic impact of the proprietary system.<sup>85</sup> His statements were meant to stimulate young minds, yet they were also, in effect, a challenge to the polarized view of early Island history. In 1979, Baglole's re-evaluation of the role of Walter Patterson, the first British governor of the Island, appeared in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*.<sup>86</sup> The biography was significant for its detailed study of the role of Patterson (and other middle-class government officials with whom he associated) in manipulating both the proprietors and tenants to serve his own interests, in the guise of promoting the welfare of those he supposedly served. In effect, Baglole's interpretation of Patterson replaced the polarized version of Island historiography with a triangular relationship wherein middle-class Island government officials played an influential role between the interests of tenants and landlords.

By the late 1970s, a few academics began responding to Baglole's findings and questions regarding the Island's early development. The most notable of these were J.M. Bumsted and Ian Ross Robertson. Bumsted's interest in Scottish immigration led him to investigate the role of a number of individuals active in promoting the settlement of Prince Edward Island.<sup>87</sup> The difficulties these individuals encountered in colonizing their Island estates, he discovered, bore little relationship to the information provided in the historiography of 19th-century Prince Edward Island. The conclusions emerging from his own research led Bumsted to publish, in 1982, a significant essay on the writing of Island history. In this insightful historiographic piece, Bumsted argued that "the unchallenged tendency to view the Island's early development as...controlled by the land question....has been detrimental to [the development of] Island historiography".<sup>88</sup> During the same period, Ian Ross Robertson began to publish his research into the various means of protest employed

— a political consciousness raising movement. These insights regarding why Baglole never published the findings in his graduate papers were provided to the author in a letter from Baglole, 7 May 1996. Regarding the political motivations that lay behind the writing of *The Island and Confederation*, see also Robertson's comments in "Historical Writing Since 1975", pp. 157-58, 164.

84 Harry Baglole, ed., *The Land Question: A Study Kit of Primary Documents* (Charlottetown, 1975); and Harry Baglole, ed., *Exploring Island History: A Guide to the Historical Resources of Prince Edward Island* (Belfast, 1977).

85 For instance, in his chapter "The Land Question", in *Exploring Island History*, pp. 77-8, Baglole asks whether paying the annual rent was difficult for farmers to do? Did rents differ depending on location and proprietor? And, was the duration of leases significant?

86 Harry Baglole, "Patterson, Walter," *DCB*, IV (1979), pp. 605-11.

87 J.M. Bumsted, "Sir James Montgomery and Prince Edward Island, 1767-1803", *Acadiensis*, VII, 2 (Spring 1978), pp. 76-102; Bumsted, "Settlement by Chance: Lord Selkirk and Prince Edward Island", *Canadian Historical Review*, LIX, 2 (June 1978), pp. 170-88; Bumsted, "Captain John MacDonald and the Island", *The Island Magazine*, 6 (1979), pp. 15-20; and see also Bumsted's "The Stewart Family".

88 Bumsted, "The Only Island There Is", p. 19.



by the Island's tenantry against the proprietary system. In a 1977 article, Robertson noted an important correlation between the impoverished status of post-1815 Celtic immigrants to the Island and the subsequent rise of popular escheat agitation in the 1830s. He also briefly examined the economic factors influencing the ability of tenants to pay rent. And finally, he commented on the existence of an influential middle class of lawyers, land agents, and government officials in early Prince Edward Island.<sup>89</sup>

This shift in interpretation was further advanced during the 1970s, and especially in the 1980s, by many of those writing sketches of notable Islanders for the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*. The demands of biography forced researchers into micro-analyses of the course of actions taken by a number of individuals. The sweeping generalizations that had once sufficed to explain Island history could not withstand the scrutiny of biography. Ian Ross Robertson's 1972 biography of the merchant, manufacturer and reform leader, George Coles, suggested the tremendous influence of middle-class values and institutions on political and economic developments. The significance of trade and commerce in early Prince Edward Island was illustrated in H.T. Holman's biography of one of the Island's first major merchants, John Cambridge. The complex and shadowy role of the middle-class land agent was clearly illustrated in J.M. Bumsted's examination of David Lawson, one of the Island's first proprietary agents. And the inner workings of leasehold tenure on one of the Island's largest estates was revealed in M. Brook Taylor's biography of Charles Worrell.<sup>90</sup>

For those able to synthesize the scattered biographical research being completed on early Island history at this time, the historical view of tenant-landlord relations and socio-economic development was changing substantially. Baglole's emphasis on the triangular expansion of the historiographic framework to include the role of middle-class government officials was augmented by the introduction of land agents and merchants to the equation. This increased understanding of early Prince Edward Island history was markedly evident in J.M. Bumsted's monograph *Land, Settlement and Politics on Eighteenth-Century Prince Edward Island*, which focused on the initial British settlement of the Island and demonstrated that socio-economic factors other than landlord-tenant relations played an instrumental role in the colony's slow development in the 18th century.<sup>91</sup> In an article in *The Island Magazine* focusing on one 19th-century Island proprietor, Deborah Stewart reported similar findings, and pointed to the need for greater economic and comparative analysis of the proprietary system.<sup>92</sup> Ian Ross Robertson's introduction to an edited version of the report of the *Prince Edward Island Land Commission of 1860* and M. Brook Taylor's comments

89 Ian Ross Robertson, "Highlanders, Irishmen, and the Land Question in Nineteenth-Century Prince Edward Island", in L.M. Cullen and T.C. Smout, eds., *Comparative Aspects of Scottish and Irish Economic and Social History, 1600-1900* (Edinburgh, 1977), pp. 227-40.

90 Ian Ross Robertson, "Coles, George", *DCB*, X (1972), pp. 182-88; Holman, "Cambridge, John"; J.M. Bumsted, "Lawson, David", *DCB*, V (1983), pp. 477-78; and M. Brook Taylor, "Worrell, Charles", *DCB*, VIII (1985), pp. 953-55.

91 J.M. Bumsted, *Land, Settlement, and Politics on Eighteenth-Century Prince Edward Island* (Montreal and Kingston, 1987). Bumsted fleetingly alludes to the fact that parts of his arguments and lines of reasoning for this significant work were "anticipated" in the earlier writing of Baglole, p. 228.

92 Deborah Stewart, "Robert Bruce Stewart and the Land Question", *The Island Magazine*, 21 (1987), p. 11.

about early Island historians in his study of 19th-century Canadian historiography also implied a rural 19th-century milieu on the Island far more complex than the older historiography had suggested.<sup>93</sup>

The 1990s have witnessed further strides in expanding interpretations of the history of the Island in the 19th century to include previously neglected "middle-ground" issues. These advances are mainly the result of the increased interest of Atlantic Canadian historians in understanding class formation and the development of mercantile-capitalist relations in the pre-industrial countryside.<sup>94</sup> The impact of this new rural history on the interpretation of Island historiography is clearly seen in the writings of Rusty Bittermann. Bittermann's Ph.D. thesis studying the Escheat movement provided some significant, if brief, analysis of the influence of socio-economic factors in the timing of popular agitation against the proprietary system.<sup>95</sup>

Bittermann also contributed to a more sophisticated understanding of socio-economic development in early Prince Edward Island in two notable articles. In his study of wage-labour in the 19th century, he drew on a number of Prince Edward Island examples in challenging the stereotype of independence and self-sufficiency among the majority of rural inhabitants in the pre-industrial Maritimes. And, his article on women and the escheat movement provided the first serious examination of issues of gender and the female economy in early Prince Edward Island society.<sup>96</sup>

The authors of the various chapters in Phillip Buckner and John G. Reid's 1994 edited volume, *The Atlantic Region to Confederation: A History*, also made a noteworthy contribution towards the development of a more nuanced view of Island history in the 19th century.<sup>97</sup> Because the book was organized chronologically, in each chapter authors sought to compare and contrast developments within the entire

93 Ian Ross Robertson, ed., *The Prince Edward Island Land Commission of 1860* (Fredericton, 1988), pp. ix-xxx; Taylor, *Promoters, Patriots, and Partisans*. Regarding the significance of Robertson's edited version of the 1860 land commission report see Rusty Bittermann's review "Why Make a Disturbance?", *New Maritimes*, 8 (March-April 1990), pp. 30-2.

94 See for instance T.W. Acheson, "New Brunswick Agriculture at the End of the Colonial Era", *Acadiensis*, XXII, 2 (Spring 1993), pp. 5-9; Rusty Bittermann, "The Hierarchy of the Soil: Land and Labour in a 19th Century Cape Breton Community", *Acadiensis*, XVIII, 1 (Fall 1988), pp. 33-55; Bittermann et al, "Of Inequality and Interdependence in the Nova Scotian Countryside", pp. 1-43; Béatrice Craig, "Agriculture in a Pioneer Region: The Upper St. John River Valley in the First Half of the 19th Century", in Kris Inwood, ed., *Farm, Factory and Fortune: New Studies in the Economic History of the Maritime Provinces* (Fredericton, 1993), pp. 17-37; Stephen J. Hornsby, *Nineteenth-Century Cape Breton: A Historical Geography* (Montreal & Kingston, 1992); and Rosemary E. Ommer, ed., *Merchant Credit and Labour Strategies in Historical Perspective* (Fredericton, 1990).

95 See Bittermann's brief comments regarding the correlation of escheat agitation with demographic pressures, exploitative middle-class elements, settlement difficulties, the impact of distress in the timber and shipbuilding industries, and the impact of poor harvests, "Escheat!", pp. 24, 48, 87-8, 244-49.

96 Rusty Bittermann, "Farm Households and Wage Labour in the Northeastern Maritimes in the Early 19th Century", *Labour/Le Travail*, 31 (1993), pp. 13-46; Rusty Bittermann, "Women and the Escheat Movement: The Politics of Everyday Life on Prince Edward Island", in Janet Guildford and Suzanne Morton, eds., *Separate Spheres: Women's Worlds in the 19th-Century Maritimes* (Fredericton, 1994), pp. 23-38.

97 Phillip A. Buckner and John G. Reid, eds., *The Atlantic Region to Confederation: A History* (Fredericton, 1994).

Atlantic Region. For the first time since W.S. MacNutt's study of the Atlantic provinces, written over three decades earlier, in 1965, Atlantic Canadian historians placed the Island's development alongside that of the other colonies of the Atlantic Region. This was a significant breakthrough, for previously, as Ian Ross Robertson has noted, "consideration of island developments has often been absent from general treatments of Maritime subjects".<sup>98</sup> By placing Prince Edward Island within the larger context of the development of the Atlantic Region, Buckner and Reid's edited history made it possible to see the Island's development as actually similar to that of the surrounding colonies, despite the constraints of the proprietary system.

While the recent works of the late 1980s and 1990s have made significant advances in presenting a more holistic view that increases knowledge about specific aspects of 18th and early 19th-century Prince Edward Island, even these new interpretations are often constrained by the authors' implicit acceptance of traditional analytical frameworks. Whether the themes of these recent works are Acadian history, popular history, the shipbuilding industry or tenant protest movements, their interpretations are inherently flawed by their reliance on previous polarized interpretations of the past regarding tenant-landlord relations and the existence of a non-commercial, egalitarian "golden age" in the pre-Confederation era.<sup>99</sup> For instance, Georges Arsenault's *The Island Acadians: 1720-1980* (trans. Sally Ross, Charlottetown: Ragweed Press, 1989) fills a significant gap in Acadian studies in Prince Edward Island. Nevertheless, the author, who was employed by the Saint Thomas Aquinas Society to promote Acadian culture, uncritically accepts previous assumptions portraying the Acadian community as a harmonious society with no socio-economic stratification or conflicting class interests.<sup>100</sup> Similarly, Douglas Baldwin's *Land of the Red Soil: A Popular History of Prince Edward Island* (Charlottetown: Ragweed Press, 1990), while incorporating much of the recent literature in Island historiography into the text, still leaves the thematic impression of 19th-century Island history as centred around a victimized tenantry at the mercy of an exploitative proprietary elite.

In Nicolas J. de Jong and Marven E. Moore's *Shipbuilding in Prince Edward Island: Enterprise in a Maritime Setting, 1787-1920* (Hull: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1994) a refreshingly sophisticated examination of Prince Edward Island shipbuilding and timber sales and the cyclical market fluctuations of these industries is provided. Nevertheless, the authors virtually ignore the vital role and impact of merchant-capitalism in shipbuilding and timbering, and its influence on the structures of Island society, politics and land tenure. Who the workers were who built the ships and cut the timber, why they left their farms to work seasonally in shipyards and

98 W.S. MacNutt, *The Atlantic Provinces: The Emergence of Colonial Society, 1712-1857* (Toronto, 1965); Robertson, "The Maritime Colonies", pp. 275-76.

99 See for instance Daniel Samson's fleeting treatment of Prince Edward Island in his larger examination of rural history in Atlantic Canada in the Introduction and Afterword of *Contested Countryside*. Samson comments that the predominate characteristic of early Prince Edward Island was the "land question, rooted in the dominance of absentee landowners and tenant producers", p. 12.

100 See Phyllis Wagg's comments about the need to address questions of socio-economy in the telling of Acadian history in "Stratification in Acadian Society: Nineteenth Century Richmond County", *La société historique Acadienne*, XXIII, 3-4 (juillet-décembre 1992), pp. 158-67.

forests, and how these socio-economic factors influenced their relations with merchants and landlords is never analysed.<sup>101</sup>

The latest scholarly book to appear on 19th-century Prince Edward Island is Ian Ross Robertson's *The Tenant League of Prince Edward Island, 1864-1867: Leasehold Tenure in the New World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996). It is the first attempt to analyse the tenant movement which contributed to the demise of the proprietary system, and as such it is an invaluable study. Yet it too falls back on the old framework, wherein the essence of Island history is a political struggle between tenants and proprietors. Anti-proprietary agitation is explained as a psychological response to a situation (tenantry and tenurial insecurity) Robertson misleadingly calls "absolutely untypical of North America". Overlooked are the vital socio-economic factors, including demographic pressures on the land, the "actual" burden (or non-burden) of the rental payment and the status of the market place for Island farm products that had a direct impact on the political decision making processes of the tenantry.<sup>102</sup>

Lamentably, new historiographic concepts and models — and thus the reputations of those who put them forward — are frequently based on the discrediting of previous authors and theories. In concentrating in this review on what seems "wrong" with the writing of 19th-century Island history (*i.e.*, its polarization), without really discussing what is "correct", it seems appropriate at this juncture to quote the 12th-century proto-Renaissance historian Bernard of Chartres, who declared: "Although we may see more and further than they [previous writers], it is not because our sight is keener or our stature greater, but because they bear us up and raise us by their own gigantic height".<sup>103</sup> In thematically tracing the social, economic and political exigencies that influenced and polarized historical interpretations of 19th-century Prince Edward Island, this review has, of necessity, been based on deductive reasoning in the belief that history is advanced not by tearing down previous works, but by acknowledging, utilising, and then building upon the limitations and other factors that influenced earlier writers.

Certainly, because of the lack of a graduate programme in history on the Island, scholarly writing about the Island's past has lagged behind the other neighbouring

101 In his review of this work in *The Island Magazine*, 38 (1995), pp. 39-40, Lewis R. Fischer notes that "the book tells us next to nothing about the actual work processes or workers in the industry it purports to examine".

102 See the review of this book by Matthew G. Hatvany in *The American Review of Canadian Studies* (forthcoming). Regarding the misleading claims about the "uniqueness" of the Island's proprietary system repeated throughout the book, see, for instance, the comparisons made between the Island and the seigneurial system of Quebec and the land rental systems in western Quebec and Ontario in "The Escheat Pamphlet", *The Islander*, 5 and 12 January 1855. See also William L. Marr, "Tenant vs. Owner Occupied Farms in York County, Ontario, 1871", in Donald H. Akenson, ed., *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, IV (Gananoque, 1984), pp. 50-71; Catherine Anne Wilson, *A New Lease on Life: Landlords, Tenants and Immigrants in Ireland and Canada* (Montreal and Kingston, 1994); and Paul W. Gates, "Research in the History of American Land Tenure: A Review Article", *Agricultural History*, XVIII (1954), pp. 121-26.

103 Bernard of Chartres, quoted in H.G. Koeningsberger, *Medieval Europe 400-1500* (New York, 1987), p. 201.

provinces and states. If the writing of Prince Edward Island history is to continue to progress and make the best use of the new regional, national and international insights and methodologies in the researching and writing of 19th-century history in the “Northeastern Borderlands” of Canada and the United States, then the old polarized equation of “good” and “egalitarian” resident tenants versus “bad” absentee landlords (with the venal and manipulative local government officials thrown in to make a triangular relationship) must be set aside. A new and provocative approach is needed that incorporates into the interpretation of the province’s early history and geography a loosely defined “middle class” of merchants, land agents, entrepreneurs and prospering farmers (both freehold and tenant) engaged in a recognizably commercial economy connected to domestic, regional and international markets. Just as historians have been discovering that the proprietors were not uniformly “bad” (in any sense of the word) or even always “absentee”, so our view of the tenantry needs to be revised. All tenants were not the same, and the leasehold system arguably was not a terrible burden to everyone.<sup>104</sup> In fact, we need to address the whole impact of the leasehold system on people’s lives and compare it with the lot of freehold and tenant farmers on the Island and in other regions of North America. Was the Island’s socio-economy typical or atypical because of the proprietary system? Did the “Land Question” really dominate the Island as much as the historiography suggests? How hard was it for a tenant to pay rent? What factors influenced ability to pay? What economic impact did absentee landlords have on the Island’s development? These are just a few of the obvious questions that beg to be asked in re-assessing the Island’s early history.

Clearly, the writing of Prince Edward Island’s 19th-century history, especially as it concerns the “Land Question”, is far from the “dead horse” going nowhere to which some scholars have compared it. In fact, the Island’s experience with an “Old World” system of land tenure on a continent where freehold tenure was perceived as the norm represents, in this author’s opinion, an exciting and important scholarly opportunity for Island and Northeastern historians to conduct comparative history. New insights may well be gained by comparing the nature of land tenure on Prince Edward Island with other forms of leasehold tenure that existed in French Canada, New Holland, Spanish America, and with the leasehold and “mortgage” tenure that was so much more prevalent than has often been recognized in the English settlements of North America. Such a fresh perspective that breaks away from the polarized version of 19th-century Island history can galvanize discussion of socio-economic issues in early Prince Edward Island while casting light on larger issues of land, labour and economy within northeastern North America.

MATTHEW G. HATVANY

104 See for instance Matthew G. Hatvany, “‘Wedded to the Marshes’: The Island’s Early Settlers”, *Guardian-Patriot*, 7 January 1995; and two other articles by the same author, “An Enduring Mythology: The Proprietary Burden in Prince Edward Island”, in Serge Courville and Brian Osborne, eds., *Histoire mythique et paysage symbolique/Mystical History and Symbolic Landscape* (Ste-Foy, 1997), pp. 21-9; and “Almanacs and the New Middle Class: New England and Nova Scotian Influences and Middle-Class Hegemony in Early Prince Edward Island”, *Histoire sociale/Social History*, 30, 60 (forthcoming, November 1997).