

Back to the Future: The New History of Atlantic Canada

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FORUM

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Introduction

ON 5 MAY 2000 some one hundred people crowded into a lecture hall at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax for the first session of the Atlantic Canada Studies Conference, XIII. For the occasion, the organizers, Brook Taylor and Ken Dewar, had arranged several core sessions under the title “Back to the Future”. In the first two of these sessions, the objective was to examine the origins and development of the new regional history in Atlantic Canada. As Brook Taylor explained at the conference, “our goal was to celebrate and discuss the work of that first generation of regional scholars and promote a process of critical evaluation of that period”. The sessions were chaired by Gerry Hallowell and Margaret Conrad. The result was a series of thoughtful presentations and a lively discussion that focused on both past and present.

The extended Forum section in this issue presents the texts of these papers and a summary of the discussions that followed. We also include the conference address by Gerald Friesen, a leading historian of Western Canada, and an assessment of regional studies from the perspective of contemporary Acadian scholarship.

As we gathered for the first session that Friday morning, it seemed appropriate that the first speaker was Phillip Buckner, the pioneer who originated this series of regional studies conferences in the early 1970s and was also, in 1971, the founding editor of *Acadiensis*. We complete our third decade of publication, then, with a feature that examines the past and present of the field of regional history in Atlantic Canada that this journal helped to launch 30 years ago. The cover illustration reminds us as well of the original *Acadiensis*, which commenced publication a century ago. The achievements are there to be marked. But it is also clear that, as always in history, the story continues.