

## Rosemary Ommer and the Coasts Under Stress Research Project Team, *Coasts Under Stress: Restructuring and Social-Ecological Health*.

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been useful, for example, to have had at least one of his essays on mumming in Newfoundland included in the volume (although they are available elsewhere).

A review of *Folklore: An Emerging Discipline* should not end on such a critical note. Instead it should place on record sentiments of gratitude and appreciation, for this volume recalls and honours, on behalf of all of us who knew him — as colleague, friend, teacher, fellow scholar — or were influenced by him less directly, someone who left his indelible mark on the growth and shaping of a discipline in well over 60 years. Herbert Halpert's own writings bear eloquent, indisputable witness to who he was and to the legacy he has left behind, and the image which emerges from those writings blends subtly with the emergence of the field of study he served so well.

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Rosemary Ommer and the Coasts Under Stress Research Project Team, *Coasts Under Stress: Restructuring and Social-Ecological Health* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), ISBN (0773532250) 9780773532250; ISBN (077353203X) 9780773532038.

IN HER EXTRAORDINARY 1955 BOOK, *The Edge of the Sea*, Rachel Carson described coastlines as an "elusive and indefinable boundary" (11). While Carson's work was focused solely on the natural history of the littoral zone, her definition could equally be applied to the broad and complex social and ecological changes that Rosemary Ommer and the Coasts Under Stress Research Project Team describe in their massive study of Canada's Pacific and Atlantic coastal regions. With a supporting cast of over 50 co-investigators and innumerable research collaborators, *Coasts Under Stress* is in itself an exercise in crossing the intangible boundaries that encapsulate our understanding of Canada's coastal regions. Through careful and detailed study of the social and economic changes that underpin the history of ecological transformation in their study regions, the book's authors attempt a full interdisciplinary account of the crisis that has so severely impacted many rural communities along the shores of the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans. By touching on a remarkable range of issues (not only the predictable discussion of fisheries, aquaculture, and offshore oil development, but also health care restructuring, rural education, nutrition, and substance abuse) and a diverse array perspectives including science, sociology, history, and geography (to name only a few of the disciplinary approaches in the volume), the authors attempt to synthesize the multiple lines of causation that have produced collapsed fisheries, depopulated communities, and social stress among rural families in coastal regions.

Of course, the great danger of such an ambitious project is that it might collapse under its expansive scope and complexity. For the most part, *Coasts Under Stress*

manages to weave together different strands of knowledge about two very different socio-ecological regions into a seamless whole. Ommer and her co-authors employ several key organizing principles, most notably the concept of restructuring (economic, social, or ecological) as a means to link together the impacts of diverse external phenomena such as government cutbacks, capital flight, and collapsing ecosystems. The authors also successfully integrate concepts across the great divide of the social and biological sciences. I found the discussion of cultural keystone species particularly valuable in this regard, a concept that recognizes the link between human societies and culturally significant ecological agents (salmon, cod, sea kelp, etc.) while resisting the managerial tendency to reduce such species to mere stocks of valuable resources. There are also excellent individual chapters on the historical development of fisheries and mining, while the latter section of the book provides extremely valuable chapters assessing the potential for various economic activities such as aquaculture and tourism to increase and/or diminish the resilience of coastal communities. One of the strongest chapters included lengthy quotations from coastal residents whose lives had been profoundly affected by socio-ecological restructuring. Indeed, the authors' ability to combine local voices with data-driven research material from so many disciplinary perspectives is one the great strengths of *Coasts Under Stress*, resulting in a virtuoso research effort and one of the more unique and engaging studies of regional environments that I have ever encountered.

And yet, as impressive as this study may be, the authors of *Coasts Under Stress* have not succeeded completely in their efforts to create the seamless web of knowledge about coastal environments that they intended. At times, the reader gets the impression that the eclectic nature of the research effort somehow escaped the control of the principal authors. One chapter on health care restructuring, for instance, includes tales of underpaid and laid off nurses, bed shortages, and hospital closures. These events, however, are structural changes that affected nearly all rural and urban Canadian who lived through the funding cutbacks of the 1990s. One is left to ask what is particularly coastal about health care restructuring in British Columbia and Newfoundland, and what is the relationship between this process and other forms of social and ecological change such as collapses in the fisheries and forestry issues. This reader at least gets the impression that the health experts on the panel wrote a very discipline specific chapter with little effort to integrate their findings with others aspects of the research project.

Much the same process occurred in a somewhat bizarre section where the research team actually engages in a geological analysis of offshore oil and gas potential off the BC coast. Why the Coasts Under Stress Research Team should be out there attempting to find oil and gas — essentially a narrow industrial activity — and more importantly how this very specific knowledge is relevant to the broader theme of social-ecological restructuring is never made clear. Moreover, the highly technical language in this section seems to defeat the interdisciplinary spirit of the work.

At one point, for example, the authors claim that they have been able to “provide an updated interpretation and correlation of Tofino Basin Cenozoic stratigraphy with new integrated foraminifer and ichthyolith biostratigraphies and strontium age controls” (366). As momentous as this may be, I have no idea what the authors are talking about. Indeed, language such as this seems to reflect a determination in some chapters to maintain disciplinary norms rather than fully engage with readers from diverse academic and other backgrounds. As a result, many readers may prefer not to wade through all of the more than 500 pages included within *Coasts Under Stress*, but instead select chapters and sections that reflect their particular area of interest in coastal issues.

That being said, *Coasts Under Stress* is undoubtedly a monumental achievement in terms of pure and integrated research output. Anybody who is concerned about the state of Canada’s fisheries, the socio-ecological challenges facing rural coastal communities, or human health in coastal regions will find a wealth of meticulously crafted research material that illuminates and expands our understanding of key issues in their area of interest. The work of the Coast Under Stress Research Team has made Carson’s elusive coastlines that much more comprehensible to their readers, and in doing so they have begun to point the way toward sustaining the rich social and ecological health of these regions.

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*Essays in The History of Canadian Law*, Vol IX, *Two Islands: Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island*. Edited by Christopher English. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005, ISBN: 0802090435

THE NINTH VOLUME IN THE Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History’s well-received *Essays in the History of Canadian Law* series explores the legal historical linkages and distinctions between Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island and, in a more limited fashion, the degree to which this history corresponded to the rest of the empire. Editor Christopher English, coordinator of the law and society program at Memorial University, recognized that marrying Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island offered a pairing that some might find odd. He argues that a contrast of the two islands reveals continuities and idiosyncrasies that are valuable in of themselves while suggesting lines of comparison with other jurisdictions. In this, English is on solid ground and although the collection is a bit uneven, it deepens and broadens our sense of Canada’s legal history while offering scholars a challenge to build upon the work already done.

Containing 13 essays plus English’s introduction, *Two Islands* presents a five part survey of historiography, the administration of justice, property law and inheritance, legal status and access to the courts by women, and litigation in chancery