

Comptes rendus — Book Reviews

T. W. ACHESON — *Saint John: The Making of a Colonial Urban Community*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985. Pp. 314.

For years now T. W. Acheson's seminal articles have reoriented our consciousness of the Maritimes' later nineteenth century experience within Confederation. In this volume he turns to urban social history, casting the colonial experience of Saint John in a broader North Atlantic frame of reference and advancing the historiography concerning the emergence of colonial communities. Recently, quantitatively oriented scholars have tended to strip much of the humanity away from their subjects, presenting a bare-bones analysis without substantial reference to events or personalities, either within their immediate or larger community settings. No one will accuse Acheson of that failing.

The book opens with a sweeping analysis of Saint John's colonial origins and development which is rooted squarely within imperial and provincial politics for the period 1784-1850. Parts of the volume deal with the entire period but concentration is on the pivotal transitions between 1835 and 1850 when so much happened to the city and province within the framework of empire. The established literature on the timber industry and broader developments within New Brunswick are deftly sketched through the crises of the 1840s, as is Saint John's central place in the provincial society and economy. At the core of this analysis is the dichotomy Acheson posits between the staples-export-oriented "Great Merchants" and an emerging — colonial-based — economic group focussed on the metropolitan/hinterland relationships surrounding the Saint John Kiver and the Bay of Fundy. Tensions regarding appropriate policies and responses to the dramatic events of the 1840s provide departure points for a multi-faceted analysis of an urban community in transition.

Acheson establishes the institutional structures through an analysis of the unique 'Common Council' and 'Freeholder' system created for the city at the time of its founding in 1784. He analyses the composition and performance of the various groups who came to dominate the common council and mayoralty throughout the city's first seventy years. Local elites set their agendas for management of the urban community relative to both imperial and provincial dictates, but the successive challenges to elite authority from within make up the bulk of this chapter. Merchants and artisans are seen blending and bending in response to various issues threatening the city's hegemony over its hinterland, however defined. In this case Acheson offers a classic restatement of traditional metropolitan/hinterland relations.

A chapter on the "Great Merchants" views on social order assesses the fully formed community in crisis during the 1830s and 1840s, when alternative economic strategies competed for attention. Positive linkage between economic objectives and control over community activities and strategies is at the core of this issue. In controlling the Common Council, the "Great Merchants" were able to set political and economic agendas for the community through the 1830s. Producer classes, with a different perception of the role of government in the community, eventually rearticulated community objectives in their own interests.

Led by a bourgeoisie of articulate artisans these producer classes expressed a new community consciousness through a number of new institutions and organizations. Temperance and Mechanic's Institutes led a host of other socio-political expressions to culminate in 1845-46 with the "Provincial Association", a protective response challenging the free-trade orthodoxy of mercantile elites. A debate concerning the nature and role of governments in colonial communities raged unresolved at the base of these issues. Nascent artisanal-industrialists ceased seeing their city's future bound to the staples-dominated past and successfully challenged traditional mercantile elites for leadership of their

community. In the process they also threatened established definitions of the state's role in regulating community affairs.

Subsequent chapters substantiate this basic scenario by examining community responses to the immigrant question, evangelical movements, temperance, education, political reform, provision of public services, and police and public control issues. Each chapter — a distinct study in its own right — contributes to the general picture of a community in transition. The layers of British immigration culminating in the explosive impact of the famine Irish onto the urban scene in the 1840s transferred institutional structures and religious animosity from the old country and had to be dealt with. Acheson is at his best when dealing with the intricate relationships spawned by these conflicts, which culminated in the cataclysmic July 12th riots of 1849 to provoke a determined middle-class effort to regulate social relations in the city's public spaces.

Evangelism, temperance, educational and political reform are all aspects of the same phenomenon; the rise to prominence of the respectable middling classes. All the reform issues were played out against the *laissez faire* hegemony of established elites; all proffered coherent approaches to decisive questions facing their community. The extent to which artisan/industrialists were able to make Saint John their community was reflected in their seizure of political power from the hands of the "Great Merchants". The same individuals, exercising their different facets, came to articulate the community's response on a host of social issues. Throughout we are reminded that the Saint John experience was not untypical of events whenever urban centres had to respond to explosive population expansion that featured excessive crowding and social tensions. This, of course, is the central theme of much recent urban social history dealing with the 19th century.

The book's last substantive chapter presents a brief quantitative analysis of Saint John's population in 1851, the date of the first manuscript census permitting disaggregated correlation of social and occupational attributes. What Acheson uncovers is a community sharply differentiated by ethnicity and religion, a city layered socially and economically by its historical experience. Ethnic and religious homogeneity defined status in the 'Little Commonwealths' comprising each household. Groping towards self-definition in terms of colonial realities, the various communities that composed this urban matrix existed in a clearly defined hierarchy, from the loyalist patriarchs at the top to the recently arrived Catholic Irish labourers crowded into the slums of Kings Ward.

Central to Acheson's thesis is the community's progression from primitive fragments organized to serve staples extraction to a sophisticated community capable of redefining and reproducing itself with each new generation. In the crisis of the 1840s collective responses to the various issues dominating their community signalled the middle class's will to make the city over to their own image of what respectable society should be.

Responsibility and collaboration — even compulsion when appropriate — were at the core of their beliefs concerning the state's role in the community. Unable to agree on many of the finer points of theology or ideology in many spheres, they readily defined and marshalled their collective strength to achieve common objectives. Safety and security of property were basic expectations. Gradually, actualization of potential across a variety of realms became more central, as the city's artisans used their new-found political power to enunciate a new role for the state in encouraging economic diversification. The familiar terrain of the city became a testing ground where new middle class politicians sought out the limits of governmental intervention in social and economic affairs. Building better streets, protecting themselves from crippling conflagrations, policing against riot, organizing the literacy of their children; all were achievable within the sphere of their definition of community. Success there would encourage them to attempt more at other levels. These urban professional and artisan elites would soon become the statesmen of railroads and Confederation.

This book juxtaposes some rather old-fashioned and quite modern methodologies and paradigms. A sustained narrative of events is supplemented by the precision of quantitative assessment whenever the sources permit. The result is sometimes idiosyncratic, flitting back and forth from informed narrative to quantitative insights. Working class responses are softened somewhat by

Acheson's eschewing any sustained analysis based on class conflict. The core of the contested terrain of city management, though, certainly reflected class interests, albeit those of the middle and upper classes primarily. Within his frame of reference poorer workers were sometimes to be dealt with by the establishment, never quite an entity to be analysed in any detail.

The thesis that traditional commercial elites lost their position of dominance in local affairs to alternative elites who successfully challenged their control over the instruments of community identity is clearly and convincingly put. These new men-of-industry adapted traditional instruments to changing circumstances. What Acheson discovers in their quest for order are the roots of community consciousness. His identification of it with an emerging middle class of indigenous professionals and artisans is powerful and convincing.

This is the most significant monograph to be published in Maritime history since Ernie Forbes' ground-breaking *Maritime Rights Movement*, almost a decade ago. More than that though, anyone interested in exploring urban communities in transition during the 19th century should make this volume a new reference point. It advances our understanding far beyond the sterile approach of the pure quantifiers and leaps far beyond the triviality of the more traditional city biographers of an earlier era.

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FRED ANDERSON — *A People's Army: Massachusetts Soldiers and Society in the Seven Years War*. Published for The Institute of Early American History and Culture. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984. Pp. 274.

Military history has been changing of late; it is no longer a matter of battles, strategy and logistics. Much greater attention is being paid to the social composition of the armies, their relationship to society in general and the experience of the ordinary soldier in the field. Anderson's work is a fine example of this "new military" history; indeed it is as much social history and, at times intellectual history, as anything. The army closely reflected colonial society and its attitudes and beliefs.

It is Anderson's thesis that the Seven Years War had a wide-spread, and even profound, impact on the lives of Massachusetts' inhabitants; almost every family had someone serving with the army. The shared wartime experience created a "generation", analogous to that which Robert Wohl postulated for 1914, and shaped the colonists' common reaction toward the mother country's actions during the 1760s and 1770s, which, it is maintained, should be seen as a postwar rather than as a pre-revolutionary period.

There is a fine description of the make-up of the army: its social composition, the age and geographical distribution of the men, the periods of service. What quickly becomes clear is that the Massachusetts militia was indeed a people's army with men from all areas and every class in society. Young men especially found in army service a chance to amass the capital to buy a farm, to marry or get a start in life. Such an army was essentially a collection of war bands held together by bonds of friendship, kinship and personal loyalty. It was a far cry from the British army composed of an aristocratic officer class and a soldiery recruited from the dregs of society, held together by a brutal code of discipline.

Such social differences helped shape a colonial outlook quite at variance from that of the British on the nature and conduct of military service and of war itself. Provincial leadership depended on negotiation, explanation, the creation of trust between leaders and men, not the unquestioned acceptance of blind orders under fear of flogging or death. Such a structure could easily disintegrate under stress. In Massachusetts military service itself was seen in contractual terms (a natural reflection