

sociale de la lecture. Après 1840, le clergé catholique « prendra les choses bien en main pour un siècle. À cet égard, l'incendie de 1849 marque la fin d'une époque » (457). Pourquoi cette glissade sur une période qu'il n'a pas étudiée ? Malgré son importance, la bibliothèque du parlement n'était pas la seule institution culturelle ni même la seule bibliothèque. Les journaux ont continué d'exister et l'édition locale ou officielle n'a pas cessé. La relation entre culture et société déborde manifestement le cadre choisi par Gallichan.

Malgré cette réserve sur l'aspect social et en dépit de l'agacement suscité par les nombreuses répétitions, cette étude, qui insère le livre dans le développement des institutions, s'avère une belle contribution à l'histoire culturelle du Bas-Canada.

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Stephen J. Hornsby — *Nineteenth-Century Cape Breton. A Historical Geography*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992. Pp. xxvi, 274.

To paraphrase a popular Nova Scotian folksong, this first book by Stephen Hornsby, based on research done for his doctoral thesis at the University of British Columbia, tells the story of being "down and out on the Mira". The author is a pessimist who argues that fragmentation and scarcity within the Cape Breton resource base, particularly in terms of a lack of arable land, doomed the island to stagnation and marginality. Within two generations after large scale settlement began, hard times on the farm, combined with few prospects elsewhere in the Cape Breton economy, meant that emigration had become an endemic feature of life in this community. Hornsby presents the exodus as being essentially the "inevitable" (207) consequence of problems rooted in Cape Breton's natural endowment.

The central players in this story of largely unfulfilled expectations are the thousands of Scots who poured into Cape Breton mainly through the quarter century which followed the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815. Pushed overseas by economic dislocation associated with the Highland Clearances and pulled into Nova Scotia by dreams of independence and well-being to be obtained through land ownership, these pioneers quickly emerged as the dominant population group on Cape Breton island. The first comers did best, thanks to their being relatively well off in terms of skills and capital, as well as having the advantage of being able to obtain good land at low prices. By the middle of the nineteenth century, many of these pioneers had established commercial farms which gave them a standard of living higher than they had known back in the Old Country. But those who arrived after about 1830 had less to be thankful for. Echoing an analysis first emerging from the research of Rusty Bittermann, Hornsby argues that the later immigrants arrived with few assets and often were obliged to satiate their hunger for land by settling for squatter's title to backcountry terrain from which they rarely could extract even a subsistence existence. There, they evolved into a chronic rural underclass characterized by poverty and powerlessness.

All the structural flaws found within this new frontier community became glaringly apparent during the infamous potato blight of the mid to late 1840s. Suddenly deprived of their prime source of nutrition, Cape Breton's backland population averted mass starvation only by selling off their meagre accumulations of capital, mainly in the form of livestock, and then incurring an ever greater burden of debt, most often held by their more successful frontland neighbours. The shock of this crisis, Hornsby argues, ended mass immigration into Cape Breton and also set precedents for what by the 1870s had grown into a mass exodus.

Cape Breton's agriculture problems might have been less debilitating had other resources on the island been developed to the point where they could serve as alternate sources of large scale employment and income. But that did not happen. Hornsby puts particular emphasis on the inability of both the fishery and mining to function as major generators of economic growth in Cape Breton, at least for the period prior to the 1890s. Cod and coal were present in abundance and yet neither generated the jobs and business opportunity needed to compensate for the stagnation in Cape Breton's farm sector. Hornsby explains this failure by saying that several factors were at work: geographic isolation between resource sectors, dependence on unreliable export markets, inertia bred by weakness among local entrepreneurs and predatory behaviour by off-island capitalists, most notably the British based General Mining Association and the Channel Island merchants who dominated the cod fishery. Whatever the cause, the net effect of this situation was to make Cape Breton one of the most underdeveloped parts of late nineteenth-century Atlantic Canada. No wonder, then, why local leaders responded in the 1890s with such uncritical and generous enthusiasm when promised economic emancipation through construction of a modern steel and coal complex focused at Sydney-Glace Bay.

Hornsby's book offers a solidly researched and eminently readable antidote to the romantic nostalgia which hangs over the history of pre-industrial Cape Breton. The argument presented here perhaps exaggerates the importance resources played in shaping community development. More might have been said, for example, about the negative impact of public and private sector decision making, particularly in terms of capital investment. Why did it take so long to bring railroads to Cape Breton? Why did the Arichat fishery not anticipate Lunenburg in terms of developing an offshore bank fishery? Another criticism involves the narrow focus of Hornsby's research. Scots prevail, so much so as to exclude other constituencies, notably the Acadians and the Micmac. Women receive no more than passing mention and the author does not flesh out his inquiry by delving into topics such as marriage patterns, the incidence of literacy or customs related to property inheritance. On the other hand, Hornsby does argue persuasively that the convergence of character and circumstance found in nineteenth-century Cape Breton was reminiscent of events elsewhere, such that this small fragment of Atlantic Canada was truly "central to the national experience" (209).

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