The County Histories of Nova Scotia

By Marion Gilroy

In 1864, just thirty-five years after Haliburton's history of Nova Scotia appeared, and just a year before Murdoch's more imposing work was published, the cause of local history received its first tangible encouragement in Nova Scotia. In that year, Dr. T. B. Akins, the first Record Commissioner in the province, established an historical prize at King's College to be awarded annually for "the best history of some one or more counties in this province".

Dr. Akins had been intimately connected with the pioneer historians. Before he was twenty he had assisted Haliburton in gathering facts upon which "An historical and statistical account of Nova Scotia" is based. Beamish Murdoch was his first cousin, and when he was old enough Akins entered Murdoch's law office. It may have been that the prize awarded T. B. Akins by the Mechanics Institute in 1839 for his "History of the settlement of Halifax" gave him the idea for the establishment of his prize for county histories. In this way he hoped to emphasize the importance of collecting and preserving the local records of the various counties in the province and "the local traditions relating to the commencement and progress of the settlements as well". "I believe," he said, "there are many young men in Nova Scotia whose taste would lead them to enter on such a subject, and if stimulated by the offer of a small prize for their labor to devote some leisure to collecting material for local history and biography, thus forming a valuable groundwork for the more general historian of a future day."

His faith was justified. Before his death in 1891 fourteen counties had been the subjects of "Akins historical essays". Hants, Colchester and Annapolis had each been the subject of essays twice. Perhaps it was the small prize of thirty dollars, perhaps the chance of gaining some recognition for what had often been a life-long interest, or perhaps both, which brought to light these disciples of Clio in all parts of the province. Six of the prize-winning essays (Colchester, Yarmouth, Pictou, Annapolis, Halifax (part only), Cape Breton) were printed after being revised and enlarged; two were reprinted in part (Shelburne and Guysborough); and two essays which were submitted but did not win the prize were expanded into full county histories (Lunenburg and Digby). In spite of the combined efforts of those writing for the Akins prize and a growing number of others interested in local history, there are still several counties (Cumberland, Hants, Guysborough, Halifax, Shelburne, Cape Breton, Richmond, and Victoria) which are without so-called "county" histories.

The devotion of these early amateur historians to their task was often remarkable, considering how scattered and inaccessible local records often were. The story is told of one of them: "To enable the author to compile this history," he travelled hundreds of miles on foot; twice he walked from Digby to Halifax, getting occasional lifts along the road, and accepted whatever hospitality was offered on the way. Handicapped always by poor eyesight, which at last failed him completely, with an entire lack of means, his courage undaunted by difficulties, he spent over a quarter of a century gathering the material and producing the work, upon which he had

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1. F. W. Vroom in "The Akins historical prize essays, King's College", Nova Scotia Historical Society Collections vol. 21, p. 35 gives a particular account of the essays, which are in the library of King's College, Halifax.

set his heart." In another case, it was 
a Nova Scotian living in Boston, in 
body if not in spirit, who wrote one of 
the best county histories and left the 
manuscript of another. 3

Among the county histories which 
have been printed, many are quite in­ 
adequate. Some are little more than 
genealogical sketches of certain families 
who settled in the county; many are 
full of inaccuracies. Because of these 
deficiencies a selective list of publica­ 
tions has been compiled, with brief re­ 
marks from prefaces or introductions to 
reveal the scope of the work when the 
title does not supply the information. It 
is hoped that the list may be useful to 
anyone wishing to find local historical 
information from printed sources. With 
one exception genealogies have not been 
included, although they sometimes throw 
light on local history and conditions. Some 
titles are given under Cape Breton 
Island, for writers have generally broad­ 
ened the scope of their efforts to include 
the whole island rather than one county.

ANNAPOLIS COUNTY
Calnek, William Arthur. History of the County of 
Annapolis including old Port Royal and 
Acadia, with memoirs of its representatives 
in the provincial parliament, and biographical 
and genealogical sketches of its early English 
settlers and their families. Edited and com­ 
pleted by A. W. Savary. Toronto, Wm. 
Briggs [etc., etc.], 1897. 660 p.
Greenwood, Walter R. History of Freeport, 
Nova Scotia, 1784-1934. Freeport, N. S., 
1934. 46 p.
MacVicar, W. M. A short history of Annapolis 
Royal, the Port Royal of the French, from 
its settlement in 1604 to the withdrawal of 
the British troops in 1854. Toronto, Copp 
Clark Co., 1897. 127 p.
Morse, William Inglis. Gravestones of Acadie 
and other essays on local history, genealogy. 
and parish records of Annapolis County, 
110 p.
Morse, William Inglis. Local history of Paradise, 
Annapolis County, Nova Scotia (1684-1936). 
Boston, Nathan Sawyer & Son, 1937. 
65 p.

Morse, William Inglis. Supplement to Local 
history of Paradise, Annapolis County, Nova 
Scotia (1684-1938). Boston, Nathan Sawyer 
& Son, 1938. 79 p.
Savary, Alfred William. Supplement to the 
History of the County of Annapolis [by 
W. A. Calnek], correcting and supplying 
omissions in the original volume. Toronto, 

ANTIGONISH
Rankin, D. J. A history of the County of 
Antigonish, Nova Scotia. Toronto, Mac­ 
millan, 1929. 390 p.
Largely "genealogical data".
Whidden, D. G. The history of the town of 
Antigonish. [Antigonish, N. S., The Casket, 
1934]. 209 p.

CAPE BRETON COUNTY
MacKinnon, J. G. Old Sydney; sketches of 
the town and its people in days gone by. 
143 p.
"This little book is not issued as a history 
of Sydney. It contains some bits of history, 
but the greater part consists of tradition..."
McLennan, J. S. Louisbourg from its founda­ 
tion to its fall, 1713-1758. London, Mac­ 
millan, 1918. 454 p.
This complete and admirable study based 
on careful research is so wide in scope that 
it does not properly belong in any list of 
"local" histories. Yet the list would be in­ 
complete without it.

CAPE BRETON ISLAND
Bourinot, John G. Cape Breton and its mem­ 
orials of the French régime. Royal Society of 
Canada, Transactions, 1st series, 1891, 
section 2, p. 173-343.
"In the present work it is the object of the 
writer...to record briefly the main facts in 
its history from the days of its discovery by 
European voyagers in the remote past down 
to the present time..."
Brown, Richard. A history of the Island of 
Cape Breton, with some account of the dis­ 
covery and settlement of Canada, Nova 
Scotia, and Newfoundland. London, Samp­ 
son Low, Son, and Marston, 1869. 464 p.
Gow, John M. Cape Breton illustrated: Histor­ 
ie, picturesque and descriptive. Illustrated by 
James A. Stubbert. Toronto, William 
Briggs [etc., etc.], 1893. 423 p.
Vernon, Charles W. Cape Breton, Canada, 
at the beginning of the twentieth century.

3. Arthur Wentworth Hamilton Eaton. The manuscript 
of his unpublished History of Colchester County 
is in the Public Archives of Nova Scotia.

"The object of this book, therefore, is to set forth briefly the history of the island, to tell the story of its industrial development, and to describe its present condition, its resources and prospects..."

**COLCHESTER**


Memorial of the one hundred and twenty-second, and of the one hundred and twenty-first, advertised as the one hundred and twenty-third anniversary of the settlement of Truro, by the British, being the first celebration of the town's natal day, September 13th, 1882. Truro, N. S., Doane Bros., 1894. 95 p.

Miller, Thomas. Historical and genealogical record of the first settlers of Colchester County down to the present time... Halifax, N. S., A. & W. Mackinlay, 1873. 400 p.


Addresses.

**CUMBERLAND COUNTY**


Black, Cyrus. Historical record of the posterity of William Black, who settled in this county in the year seventeen hundred and seventy-five, also a sketch of 23 English families and some early settlers from New England, who settled at the head of the Bay of Fundy about the same time. Amherst, N. S., Amherst Gazette, 1885. 209 p.


Scott, Bertha. Springhill, a hilltop in Cumberland. Springhill, N. S., 1926. 119 p.


**DIGBY COUNTY**


**GUYSBOROUGH COUNTY**


Historic Canso. Issued under the auspices of the Town Council of Canso and the Canso Board of Trade. [Canso, N. S., 1928]. 63 p. (with advts.). [An address by A. C. Jost and] an article by John A. Morrison.

**HALIFAX COUNTY**


**HANTS COUNTY**


**INVERNESS COUNTY**

MacDougall, J. L. History of Inverness County, Nova Scotia. 1922. 600 p. Largely biographical and genealogical sketches,
KINGS COUNTY

LUNENBURG COUNTY

PICTOU COUNTY

QUEENS COUNTY

RICHMOND COUNTY
See list under heading Cape Breton Island.

SHELBURNE COUNTY

VICTORIA COUNTY

YARMOUTH COUNTY
Brown, George S. Yarmouth, Nova Scotia: A sequel to Campbell's history. Boston, Rand Avery Company, 1888. 524 p. "The author concluded that it was his duty in some measure to repair the errors of omission and commission....[in Campbell's history]."


Lawson, J. Murray, compiled: Yarmouth past and present; a book of reminiscences. Yarmouth, N. S. [Yarmouth Herald] 1902. 647 p. "...the principal resources for information are the Yarmouth newspapers published since 1831."