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The Canso Causeway: Regionalism, Reconstruction,  
Representations, and Results


Meaghan Beaton

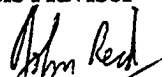
A thesis submitted in partial requirement for a Masters of  
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## **Abstract**

**The Canso Causeway: Regionalism, Reconstruction, Representations, and Results**

**Meaghan Beaton  
September 17, 2001**

“The Canso Causeway: Regionalism, Reconstruction, Representations, and Results” examines the history, construction and legacy of the Canso Causeway, the permanent link connecting mainland Nova Scotia to Cape Breton Island. The Causeway is presented as both a national reconstruction mega-project and as a provincial cultural icon. These two portrayals provide important vehicles of analysis in framing the way in which the Causeway fits into the post war aims of Canada, Nova Scotia, and in particular, Cape Breton. This thesis weaves together political, social, and cultural history and presents the Causeway’s evolution as a symbolic commentary on national, provincial, and local experiences. As the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Canso Causeway approaches it is useful to situate this structure in the Atlantic Canadian experience.

## **Acknowledgments**

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Professor Del Muise was generous enough to suggest the Canso Causeway as a subject of study and encouraged me to pursue the project at the graduate level. His friendship and guidance throughout the years has been invaluable.

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Amy Hunt and Brian Boudreau for both their shared interest in the subject matter and pushing me to think about the Causeway in a way that few others are able to!

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Carol and Wayne, and my brother, Mike, for their unconditional love, support and inspiration, not only during the writing of this thesis, but for all things I do.

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## **Introduction**

We crossed the Canso Causeway. When the front wheels of the car touched Cape Breton, Grandpa said, “Thank Christ to be home again. Nothing bad can happen to us now.”

We still had an hour’s drive or perhaps more along the coast, but it was obvious that Grandpa already considered himself in “God’s country,” or “our own country,” as he called it.<sup>1</sup>

With these words the MacDonald family marks its return to Cape Breton in Alistair MacLeod’s 1999 novel *No Great Mischief*. Yet, however fictitious his characters, MacLeod echoes sentiments that are anything but fictional. A distinctive sign to Cape Bretoners of “coming home,” the Canso Causeway connects mainland Nova Scotia and Cape Breton Island, serving as the symbolic gateway to the Island for almost fifty years. Yet despite the Causeway’s upcoming milestone, a concise history of its construction and impact has yet to be undertaken.

As the title suggests, this thesis explores various political, social, economic, and cultural issues surrounding the construction and impact of the Canso Causeway. Symbolically, the Canso Causeway serves as an excellent vehicle to analyse aspects of the history of Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia and Canada. As both an important national Second World War reconstruction initiative and a provincial cultural icon, the

Canso Causeway’s history incorporates various themes, important for analysing Nova Scotia’s pre and post war position in Canada. A project used to ease the transition from war to peace-time activity, the permanent link generated thousands of jobs and

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<sup>1</sup> Alistair MacLeod, *No Great Mischief*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc, 1999), p. 116.

greatly improved transportation to and from the Island. Initially presented as a crucial project so potentially important to the Island that it would help revive the suffering coal and steel industries, the Causeway proved more pivotal to the province's burgeoning tourism industry. Culturally, the Causeway's opening day ceremonies on August 13, 1955 epitomized the perception of Cape Breton Island as a place of preserved traditional Scottish values, the structure serving as the symbolic gateway to this world. This notion served the tourism industry well, with the province capitalizing on the region's portrayal as a quaint, idyllic society. However, despite the much needed improvement in transportation, the completion of the interface had dire consequences for the Strait area communities that had relied exclusively on Canadian National Railway's operation of the ferry system and railway terminal at Mulgrave for their livelihood.

The purpose of this thesis is to weave these themes together in order to provide a piece of the puzzle in understanding Nova Scotia's position and experience within Canada during the 1950s. So then, why the Causeway? As will be shown, the study provides an important commentary on national, provincial, and local perspectives and experiences during post war Canada.

Chapter One, "Regionalism," offers a brief historiography of Atlantic Canada. It is intended to provide a basic framework in which to situate the history, impact, and legacy of the Canso Causeway. The relatively recent explosion of scholarship constructing a history of the experience of Atlantic Canadians, starting in the early 1970s, has produced a plethora of important studies, which have all contributed to the much

needed contextualization of the region's experience within Canada. However, the history of the Causeway is an area that has remained unexplored. With the exception of the 1955 publication by Laurence J. Doucet *The Road to the Isle: The Canso Causeway - Deepest in the World*, no other studies have been conducted which specifically address the Canso Causeway. As the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Causeway approaches, it is appropriate to situate the link's history and legacy within the region's political, social, economic and cultural experience.

Chapter two, "Roots," discusses the economic, political, and social climate both within Canada and Nova Scotia from the Great Depression until the end of the Second World War. Paying particular attention to the rise and fall of industries in Cape Breton, the chapter situates the province's position on the eve of post war reconstruction. Using numerous sources, such as the 1934 *Report of the Royal Commission on Provincial Economic Inquiry*, the 1940 *Report of the Royal Commission on Dominion - Provincial Relations*, and the 1944 *Nova Scotia Report to the Royal Commission on Provincial Development and Rehabilitation*, the chapter highlights the fight waged by the province to obtain equal political, social, and, especially, economic footing within the rest of the country.

Chapter three, "Reconstruction," traces the history of the Canso Causeway. From the time the idea of constructing a permanent link to cross the Canso Strait was first introduced in 1901 until its opening day ceremonies on August 13, 1955 this chapter discusses the politics involved in bringing the project to fruition. The focal point is the

relationship between the almost mythical Nova Scotia Liberal Premier Angus L. Macdonald and his work with local citizens and organizations in lobbying for the construction of a permanent link. Further, the chapter chronicles Macdonald's working relationship with the Federal Minister of Transportation, Lionel Chevrier, to secure the project for Nova Scotia. Touted as a post war reconstruction initiative, the project's aims were twofold: firstly, to improve transportation to and from Cape Breton Island in order to revitalize the suffering coal and steel industries and, secondly, to help ease the transition from war to peace time activity by providing veterans with much needed employment opportunities. Two other important events also served to create momentum and support for the project: the construction of the TransCanada Highway and Newfoundland's entry into the fold of Canadian confederation.

Chapter four, "Representations," chronicles the epic celebration of the Canso Causeway's opening day in August 1955. Reconstructing the ceremonies of the day through primary sources such as newspaper and magazine articles and opening day souvenirs and publications, the chapter follows the day's portrayal of Cape Breton as a displaced Scottish world, with the Canso Causeway serving as the symbolic gateway to a traditional society. What emerges is a paradoxical mix of modern and antimodern perceptions. Initially construed as the saviour to the coal and steel industries this modern technological achievement was overshadowed by its portrayal as a symbolic gateway to Old Scotland. Such perceptions were compounded by the numerous tributes to Angus L. Macdonald who had passed away a year earlier, whose dream was to witness 100

bagpipers march across the “Road to the Isle.”

Chapter five, “Results,” addresses the implications following the construction of the Canso Causeway, and specifically the impact the construction of this permanent link had on those communities surrounding the Canso Strait. For towns such as Mulgrave and Point Tupper, construction of the Causeway resulted in the economic and social dislocation of their communities. Relying on Canadian National Railway’s operations of both the ferry system and the railway terminal located in Mulgrave, the company laid off hundreds of its employees, their jobs eliminated by the construction of the Causeway. This chapter traces the ensuing devastation to the Strait area. However, it also chronicles the area’s successful bid to entice Stora Kopparberg, the international pulp and paper company, to establish a mill at Point Tupper. Further, this chapter addresses the implications of the Causeway for Cape Breton Island: unsuccessful at providing an impetus to revitalize the coal and steel industries, the Canso Causeway helped prompt a boom in the tourism industry throughout the Island.



## **Chapter One: Regionalism: A Brief Historiography of the Region**

As for the Maritime provinces, nothing, of course, ever happens down there.<sup>1</sup>

When Canadian historian and political scientist Frank Underhill published *The Image of Confederation* in 1964 with this dismissive account of the Maritimes' experience in Canada, he was no doubt unaware of just how inaccurate he was. Nor could he have foreseen the flurry of Atlantic Canadian scholarship that was about to emerge, revealing the region's rich and diverse experience. Even though academic attention afforded the post-Confederation history and experience of Atlantic Canadians only started in earnest during the 1970s, the plethora of studies produced to date have brought much needed attention to the region's political, economic, social and cultural experiences during both the pre- and post- Confederation eras.

Two recent publications in particular, *The Atlantic Region to Confederation: A History*<sup>2</sup> and *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*,<sup>3</sup> mark the culmination of the diverse scholarship of the region. These collections are important, as they are the first

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Underhill, *The Image of Confederation*, The Massey Lectures, (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1964), p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> Phillip A. Buckner and John G. Reid, eds., *The Atlantic Region to Confederation : A History*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise, eds., *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993). However, it should be noted that this compilation has been subject to criticisms, the most common being its overwhelming sense of defeatism. This has most recently been acknowledged by Colin Howell in "Development, Deconstruction, and Region : A Personal Memoir," *Acadiensis*, Vol. XXX, No. 1, (Autumn 2000), pp. 23 - 30. His own chapter, "The 1900s : Industry, Urbanization, and Reform," included in the collection, Howell notes particular criticism of the book for being "assailed for the seemingly defeatist and sombre tone" with its "pessimism derived in part from the region's continuing economic woes." (p. 23)

comprehensive digest of Atlantic Canada's experience. Contributions by the region's leading scholars to these two collections highlight the myriad of critical approaches to the region's studies. Focusing on key concepts of underdevelopment and dependency theories, the latter's compilation, in particular, symbolically marked the end of what some critics saw as an era defined by "Ottawa bashing" scholarship. Today, the region's scholars are offering up a wave of new approaches to Atlantic Canadian studies, and address in particular the invention, representation and reimagination of the region.<sup>4</sup>

Yet there has been very scant attention to date paid to the Maritimes' and, in particular, Nova Scotia's social, cultural, political and economic experience in the post Second World War era.<sup>5</sup> Many academic writings have addressed the issue of regional underdevelopment in the first third of the century, yet very few have addressed economic, social and cultural issues that arose throughout the Maritimes during the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>6</sup> This is despite profound changes to the region after the war. During the reconstruction era immediately following the Second World War, the country focused its attention on massive infrastructure initiatives that transformed the very landscape of the

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<sup>4</sup> Howell, "Development, Deconstruction, and Region," pp. 23 - 24.

<sup>5</sup> Margaret Conrad, "The 1950s: The Decade of Development," *Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, p. 574.

<sup>6</sup> See for example E.R. Forbes, *The Maritime Rights Movement, 1919 - 1927 : A Study in Canadian Regionalism*, (Montreal: McGill - Queen's University Press, 1979), E.R. Forbes, *Challenging the Regional Stereotype : Essays on the 20th Century Maritimes* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1989), and Kenneth Donovan, ed., *The Island New Perspectives on Cape Breton History, 1713 - 1990*, (Fredericton : Acadiensis Press, 1990).

region. Primarily funded by the federal government, these initiatives included such massive projects as the TransCanada Highway, the Angus L. Macdonald Bridge, and the Canso Causeway. Even the borders of the region changed. With Newfoundland's entry into Confederation in 1949, the Maritimes were increasingly conceptualized as the Atlantic provinces.

Before conducting a survey of the existing historiography on the social and cultural history of the region, it is useful to examine the important concept of Atlantic Canada's underdevelopment, for it is this theme which permeates the scholarship of the region. Despite its less fashionable position with today's historians, the question of regional underdevelopment remains a crucial component to understanding the evolution of Atlantic Canada's historiography.

The region's economic backwardness is a theme that pervades its scholarly literature, and has done so since academics first started their inquiries into the history of Atlantic Canada. As early as 1971 Bruce Archibald compared Atlantic Canada's stunted economic growth to that of the rest of the country. His article "Atlantic Regional Underdevelopment and Socialism,"<sup>7</sup> shows the region's 1970 economic figures at per capita income 30% lower, unemployment 50% higher, and levels of education and government services lower than those in the rest of Canada. While recognizing that

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<sup>7</sup> Bruce Archibald, "Atlantic Regional Underdevelopment and Socialism," *Essays on the Left: Essays in Honour of T.C. Douglas*, eds., Laurier LaPierre, Jack MacLeod, Charles Taylor, Walter Young, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1971), pp. 103 - 120.

“measuring the gaps is easy; identifying the causes is more difficult,”<sup>8</sup> Archibald argues that Atlantic Canada’s underdevelopment has been exacerbated by a tendency to merely address the symptoms of underdevelopment rather than to understand and deal with its causes.

Historians like Archibald, T.W. Acheson and E.R. Forbes have discovered the causes of underdevelopment as far back as Canada’s 1879 National Policy,<sup>9</sup> a design of the federal government looking to protect and encourage Canadian businesses by implementing protectionist policies, including high tariffs. This effectively caused the cost of foreign imports to increase,<sup>10</sup> and the government hoped this would stimulate markets across the country. However, the policy ultimately resulted in limited economic growth for most of the country, and development and prosperity based along the “Toronto - Montreal axis.” The imposition of tariffs aimed at protecting Central Canada’s manufacturers from American imports ultimately had the deleterious effect of raising manufacturing costs and gave

more advanced central Canadian manufacturers the advantage over

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 103 - 104.

<sup>9</sup> These causes included traditional discriminatory transportation costs (later dealt with by the 1927 Maritime Freight Rates Act) and taxation. For in depth discussion of Freight Rates and their implications on the Maritimes, see for example, Ken Cruikshank, “The Intercolonial Railway, Freight Rates, and the Maritime Economy,” *Acadiensis*, Vol. XXII, No. 1, (Autumn 1992), pp. 87 - 110 and E.R. Forbes, “The Intercolonial Railway and the Decline of the Maritime Provinces Revisited,” *Acadiensis*, Vol. XXIV, No. 1, (Autumn 1994), pp. 3 - 35.) and taxation. (Archibald, pp. 104 - 105).

<sup>10</sup> Judith Fingard, “The 1880s : Paradoxes of Progress,” *Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, p. 83.

smaller handicraft industries which were struggling in the Atlantic region, far from the central and western markets.<sup>11</sup>

The federal government's implementation of policies promoting regional competition to support central markets undermined industries and resources important to Atlantic Canada. This proved devastating to the already fledging manufacturing sectors in the Maritimes and downturns in the region's traditional sectors of mining, lumbering, coal and fishing only exacerbated the crisis.

Historians have pointed to numerous factors contributing to this centralization and the consequent crippling of Maritime industry. Completion of the national railway saw direct competition between the Prairies and the Maritimes, both region's vying to be exporters to Central Canada.<sup>12</sup> Competition between central Canadian owned industries in the Maritimes also left the region's economy a victim of product dumping, a result of an effort by ownership to gain control of a greater share of production.<sup>13</sup> Such competition invariably resulted in industry moving to and relying on production geographically closer to central Canada.

The Maritime's economic devastation prompted Archibald's study of the region's underdevelopment during the era of the National Policy and led him to adopt the satellite - metropolis theory, transposed from Andre - Gunder Frank's study of underdevelopment

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<sup>11</sup> T.W. Acheson, "The Maritimes and "Empire Canada," " *Canada and the Burden of Unity*, ed., David Jay Bercuson, (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1977), p. 110.

<sup>12</sup> Archibald., p. 110.

<sup>13</sup> Acheson, "The Maritimes and "Empire Canada," "p. 95.

in Latin America.<sup>14</sup> Briefly, this theory states that the centralized region, or “metropolis” exerts systematic control over its periphery or “satellite” regions. This control is characterized by the metropolis’ expropriation of its satellite’s resources for development of the former’s economy, at the latter’s expense. Such a theory was readily adopted by historians studying Atlantic Canada’s underdevelopment. As Archibald summarizes:

the economy of the Atlantic region has always existed in a dependant relationship with a larger controlling metropolis, and the necessity of analysing the Atlantic area as the back yard of a dominant economic centre rather than as an autonomous but struggling economic unit comes into focus.<sup>15</sup>

This theory also found resonance in numerous other disciplines, most notably in political economy’s World Systems Theory<sup>16</sup> and international development studies on the 1960s and 1970s development of an international tourism industry.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Archibald, p. 105.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 105 - 106.

<sup>16</sup> For discussion of Wallerstein’s World Systems Theory see Robert J.S. Ross and Kent C. Trachte, *Global Capitalism : The New Leviathan*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), pp. 51 - 61. Wallerstein’s World Systems Theory explores the development of the core and the periphery, two distinct regions that have emerged as a direct result of the rise of capitalism. The core, comprised of rich regions or countries, systematically exerts control and hinders the development of the poorer core areas, aimed at complimenting and developing the growth of the core economies. What results is an unevenly developed world system where an underdeveloped and dependent periphery remains in an ancillary yet subordinate state position compared to the core.

<sup>17</sup> For an analysis of core - periphery theory using tourism as an example see Louis Turner and John Ash, *The Golden Hordes : International Tourism and the Pleasure Periphery*, (London: Constable and Company Limited, 1975) and Emanuel deKadt, *Tourism : Passport to Development? : Perspectives on the Social and Cultural Effects of Tourism in Developing Countries*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979.) All three authors argue that developing or periphery countries have turned to tourism as an

This satellite - metropolis theory was also embraced by Atlantic Canadian scholar T.W. Acheson. In his 1977 article, "The Maritimes and "Empire Canada," " Acheson discusses the history of economic development of Canada. Paying particular attention to the metropolis - satellite theory of Maritime underdevelopment he adopts Archibald's analysis, slightly modifying the terminology to metropolis - hinterland.

Acheson notes that the biggest obstacle for the Maritimes in the immediate post National Policy era was "the inability of the central Canadian market to consume the output of these new regional industries,"<sup>18</sup> that included coal, iron, steel, cotton mills and sugar refineries. The crisis became further entrenched with the lack of entrepreneurial leadership in Maritime communities to produce alternate economies or markets. This, Acheson argues, was compounded by "the colonial assumption that he [the Maritime entrepreneur] could not readily control his own destiny, that, of necessity, he would be manipulated by forces beyond his control."<sup>19</sup>

Acheson concludes that the very policies aimed at protecting the diverse economies of Canada, were those same policies that led to its undoing. Transforming the Maritimes into a client economy in place to support central Canadian markets, the hinterland proved

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economic base for development, where in most instances the subsequent reliance upon this industry has created a dependent and regressive economic state. The end result is an underdeveloped region that relies on external forces for its survival.

<sup>18</sup> Acheson, "The Maritimes and "Empire Canada," "p. 95.

<sup>19</sup> Acheson, "The National Policy and the Industrialization of the Maritimes, 1880 - 1910," *Acadiensis*, Vol. I, No.2, (Spring 1972), pp. 15 - 21, 28.



incapable of producing goods for consumption in the central Canadian market, yet forced by the very national policies that had earlier promised economic security to supply most of its consumers needs from central Canadian industry.<sup>20</sup>

Further, he notes that metropolis - hinterland relationships imply reciprocity, but that none seemed forthcoming from central Canada. Shattering the Maritime economy, the National Policy left the region as nothing more than a “branch - plant economy” to serve the interests of central Canadian markets.<sup>21</sup>

Nova Scotia’s coal industry is such an example of a National Policy branch plant economy. During the 1880s the province’s coal production was aimed at servicing the Toronto and Montreal markets.<sup>22</sup> However, this was tempered by two developments in central Canada: firstly their inability to consume the coal offerings of Nova Scotia, and, secondly, the dumping of coal (as well as iron and steel) because of cut throat price wars being played out in the region through companies whose ownership of the industries was based in Toronto and Montreal.<sup>23</sup>

The history of the coal industry in Nova Scotia has been examined in depth by David Frank. Using the satellite - metropolis theory as his backdrop, he extends this theory and suggests that the proper context in which to analyse this system is within a

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<sup>20</sup> Acheson, “The Maritimes and “Empire Canada,” ” p. 96.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 100, 95.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

“Marxist analysis of regional inequalities.”<sup>24</sup> Adding to the studies on the effects of the National Policy, Frank points to the growing division of labour between regions and “the steady import of Central Canadian social and cultural norms” which included the “readily accepted (...) assumptions of central Canadian hegemony,” reiterating Acheson’s theory of colonial attitudes reflecting the inevitability of being controlled and manipulated by external forces, in this case by Montreal and Toronto owned companies who dictated prices and wages of the miners. Further, this weakness resulting from outside fiscal control and management of the industry further entrenched this set of norms that, Frank argues, continue to be accepted in the region.<sup>25</sup>

However, Frank’s greatest contribution to Atlantic Canada’s historiography is his extensive work on Cape Breton’s coal miners, their leaders, communities and culture in the pre Second World War era. This includes an examination of such topics as the condition of work in the coal mines, central Canadian ownership of this industry, labour militancy and union leaders. Decades of work in this area culminated in his recent biography on J.B. McLachlan, chronicling the life and times of this labour and union leader’s role in the economic, social and political upheaval of 1920s Cape Breton.<sup>26</sup> Frank’s work is an important contribution to Canadian biography as it contextualizes

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<sup>24</sup> David Frank, “The Cape Breton Coal Industry and the Rise and Fall of the British Empire Steel Corporation,” *Acadiensis*, Vol. VII, No. 1, (Autumn 1977), p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5 - 6.

<sup>26</sup> David Frank, *J.B. McLachlan : A Biography*, (Toronto : James Lorimer & Company Ltd., 1999).

McLachlan's importance not only in Cape Breton's history, but also serves as a narrative for the revolution of socialism that swept throughout Canada during the 1920s.

Frank's work in social and cultural history successfully refutes the claims the Maritimes are a conservative area.<sup>27</sup> Portraying Cape Breton as a hotbed of labour militancy, Frank argues that in the era of the Winnipeg Strike, changes that were taking place in Cape Breton were just as, if not more, radical than those elsewhere in the country.<sup>28</sup> A strong history of labour unrest and upheaval culminating in lengthy and militant strikes that, on occasions, lasted several months, severely crippled both the coal and steel industries on the Island. The Island's dire economic conditions and the rise of the socialism not only in Cape Breton, but throughout the country proved to be flashpoints for the rise of the tumultuous labour movement in Cape Breton during the 1920s. In an article chronicling the rise of socialism throughout the Maritimes during the first two decades of the twentieth century, Frank and Nolan Reilly note "that the region's diverse economic difficulties created enormous obstacles for the establishment of a more successful radical tradition in the Maritimes."<sup>29</sup> The authors tie this rise of the socialist

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<sup>27</sup> David Frank, "The Cape Breton Coal Miners, 1917 - 1926," PhD. Thesis, (Halifax: Dalhousie University, 1979).

<sup>28</sup> Frank, "The Cape Breton Coal Industry," pp. 3 - 43; Frank, "The Trial of J.B. McLachlan," *Labour and Working Class History in Atlantic Canada*, eds., David Frank and Gregory S. Kealey, Institute of Social and Economic Research, (Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1995), pp. 279 - 297; and Frank, "Tradition and Culture in the Cape Breton Mining Community in the Early Twentieth Century," *Cape Breton at 200 : Historical Essays in Honour of the Island's Bicentennial, 1785 - 1987*, ed., Kenneth Donovan, (Sydney: University College of Cape Breton Press, 1985), pp. 203 - 218.

<sup>29</sup> David Frank and Nolan Reilly, "The Emergence of the Socialist Movement in the

movement to political and social unrest.

During the early part of the century, the Maritimes represented 13% of the total Canadian population and comprised 10% of the membership in the Socialist Party of Canada, with 15 locals throughout the region, boasting over 300 members.<sup>30</sup> Referring specifically to Cape Breton, socialism was “closely linked to the growth of the coal industry and the experiences of the trade union movement,” and materialized in Glace Bay and Sydney Mines with the establishment of Socialist Clubs in 1904 and 1905 respectively.<sup>31</sup>

In a critical examination of the socialist experience in Canada during the past 100 years, cultural and intellectual historian Ian McKay identifies these first two decades of the twentieth century as the “First Socialism: Evolutionary Science.”<sup>32</sup> However, McKay is critical of this era, describing it as a time when “socialism would come about primarily through a widespread process of working class education and by ‘making socialists’ through persuasion.” He argues that this national rise in support of socialism was defined by foreign leaders and ideas, that “derived their theoretical sustenance from continental

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Maritimes, 1899 - 1916,” *Labour/le travailleur*, Vol. 4, 1979, p. 85.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 85 - 6.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 88 - 9.

<sup>32</sup> Ian McKay “For A New Kind of History : A Reconnaissance of 100 Years of Canadian Socialism,” *Labour/Le Travail*, Vol. 46 (Fall 2000), p. 81. McKay has also worked on earlier social and cultural issues in the Maritimes, most notably in “The Realm of Uncertainty : The Experience of Work in the Cumberland Coal Mines, 1873 - 1927,” *Acadiensis*, Vol. XVI, No. 1, (Autumn 1986), pp. 3 - 57 and “Strikes in the Maritimes, 1901 - 1914,” *Acadiensis*, Vol. XIII, No. 1, (Autumn 1983), pp. 3 - 46.

theory and their political strategies from both the United States and Britain.”<sup>33</sup>

E.R. Forbes has also examined the social developments in the Atlantic region. His groundbreaking work in such diverse areas as the Maritime Rights Movement, economic underdevelopment during the Second World War and the Prohibition and the Social Gospel movements have all contributed to a greater understanding of the social and economic developments of the region during the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>34</sup>

*The Maritime Rights Movement, 1919 - 1927: A Study In Canadian Regionalism* and *Challenging the Regional Stereotype: Essays on the 20th Century Maritimes* examine the systematic industrial underdevelopment derived from the policies of the federal government and the fight for regional equality in Canada. Forbes chronicles the loss of the region’s political power in Canada, and its subsequent fight for regional power and recognition primarily led by the middle class of the region. His work also chronicles the influence of the stereotype of Maritime conservatism on the region’s development.<sup>35</sup>

Frank, Reilly, McKay, and Forbes have all contributed greatly to the understanding of social, cultural and economic change in the early part of the century. However, this

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<sup>33</sup> McKay, “For A New Kind of History,” pp. 83 - 4.

<sup>34</sup> E. R. Forbes, *Maritime Rights Movement, 1919 - 1927*; Forbes, *Challenging the Regional Stereotype*; Forbes “Consolidating Disparity : The Maritimes and the Industrialization of Canada during the Second World War,” *Acadiensis*, Vol. XV, No. 2, (Spring 1986), pp. 3 - 27; Forbes “Prohibition and the Social Gospel in Nova Scotia,” *Acadiensis*, Vol. I, No. 1, (Autumn 1971), pp. 11 - 36; and Forbes “Cutting the Pie into Smaller Pieces : Matching Grants Relief in the Maritime Provinces During the 1930s,” *Acadiensis*, Vol. XVII, No. 1, (Autumn 1987), pp. 34 - 55.

<sup>35</sup> Forbes, *Maritime Rights Movement, 1919 - 1927*.

prolific scholarship has illustrated the need for examination of similar developments in the post WWII era. This leads to a consideration of what historiography exists for Nova Scotia during the 1940s and 1950s. As previously mentioned, there is little. Both Carman Miller<sup>36</sup> and Margaret Conrad<sup>37</sup> have contributed two general articles on the 1940s and 1950, respectively. Their works provide excellent overviews, but as Conrad succinctly notes, “there is no comprehensive analysis of economic and social changes in post-war Atlantic Canada.”<sup>38</sup>

Forbes, in “Consolidating Disparity,” studies of the systematic de-industrialization of the steel and coal industry during the Second World War. James Bickerton in his chapter on the post war regional economy from *Nova Scotia, Ottawa, and the Politics of Regional Development* focuses on post - war declines in production of coal and Premier Angus L. Macdonald’s economic orthodoxy which seemingly hindered crucial potential growth of Nova Scotia. Both Forbes and Bickerton provide excellent surveys of the political and economic turmoil of the 1940s and 1950s, however, this inevitably leads to a consideration of social and cultural issues in the province.

By far the most ground breaking studies into the social and cultural history of Nova Scotia have been accomplished by Ian McKay. Firmly rooted in a neo-Marxist theory, McKay’s research into the commodification of culture in the province has

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<sup>36</sup> Miller, “The 1940s : War and Rehabilitation,” *Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, pp. 306 - 345.

<sup>37</sup> Conrad, “The 1950s : The Decade of Development.”

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, ff 2, p. 574.

signified a new direction in Atlantic Canada scholarship, focusing on the re-imagination and re-invention of the region. In particular, *The Quest of the Folk : Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth Century Nova Scotia*<sup>39</sup> and his article “Tartanism Triumphant”<sup>40</sup> have proven to be the flashpoints for new debates over the formation and dissemination of culture in Nova Scotia.

In *The Quest of the Folk*, McKay uses folklorist Helen Creighton and handcraft guru Mary Black to chronicle the history and commodification of the province’s “folk tradition.” Focusing on the state’s role in the popularization of Nova Scotia’s “culture,” McKay chronicles the obscuring of the province’s history and traditions to make room for the popularization and expression of Scottish heritage in Nova Scotia. This, McKay argues, ultimately impedes any real understanding of class, gender and racial history of the province.<sup>41</sup> In “Tartanism Triumphant,” McKay, uses Macdonald and his commodification of Scottishness through his promotion of “tartanism,” as the impediment to the true understanding of Nova Scotia’s history. Arguing that this obscurity includes a distorted version of the real ethnic composition of the province, McKay argues that with Macdonald as head of the state’s highly organized system of dissemination of culture and tourism promotion, there has been a lasting impression of

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<sup>39</sup> Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk : Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth Century Nova Scotia*, (Montreal: McGill - Queen’s University Press, 1994).

<sup>40</sup> Ian McKay, “Tartanism Triumphant : The Construction of Scottishness in Nova Scotia, 1933 - 1954,” *Acadiensis*, Vol. XXI, No. 2, (Spring 1992). Both of these works are discussed in depth in Chapter Four.

<sup>41</sup> McKay, *The Quest of the Folk*, p. 306.

Nova Scotia as a homogenous Scottish society. However, McKay's work has been criticized by several historians who have successfully refuted several claims in "Tartanism Triumphant." Most notable are from those former Dalhousie students Brian Boudreau and Ardian Willsher.

Boudreau's examination of Angus L. Macdonald's post - war premiership in Nova Scotia, 1945 - 1949 argues against McKay's claim that the former Premier instituted an "organized information apparatus" to disseminate his "beloved, yet misguided antimodernist fascinations."<sup>42</sup> Rather, Boudreau's work shows that no such organized government apparatus existed. In fact, the Premier's post - war tenure proved to be anything but organized. Lacking effective leadership he so aptly demonstrated during the pre - Second World War years, Boudreau argues Macdonald proved indecisive and unable to appreciate the precarious economic situation of the province.<sup>43</sup> Secondly, Boudreau points to a discrepancy in McKay's work : as Nova Scotia did comprise a province with numerous cultural ethnicities other than Scottish, how was the Premier able to successfully appeal to so many voters based on an appeal to the Scottish ethnicity alone?<sup>44</sup>

Willsher's Master's thesis, *'Where are the roads?' : The Tourist and Industrial*

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<sup>42</sup> Brian Boudreau, *Restoration and Reaction : Angus L. Macdonald's post - war tenure, 1945 - 1949*, Honours Thesis (Halifax: Dalhousie University, 1997), p. 25.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32, 68, 103.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.



*Promotion of Films of the Nova Scotia Film Bureau, 1845 - 1970*,<sup>45</sup> also takes issue with McKay's work. He challenges McKay's assumptions that the government's promotion of tourism was dominated by the characterization of Nova Scotia as predominantly representing a displaced Scottish society. Through a review of promotional films distributed by Nova Scotia to promote the province as a travel destination, Willsher finds ample evidence of the experiences of Natives and Blacks in the province.<sup>46</sup> He concludes that "McKay's argument is overstated and that films, while frequently exploring themes of ethnicity did not allow simple characterization such as a singular emphasis on the Scots."<sup>47</sup>

Another major accomplishment in addressing the social and cultural history of Nova Scotia, although not confined to the post-war era, is a collection of articles edited by Marjory Harper and Michael Vance that provide an insightful examination of the cultural and social relationship between Nova Scotia and Scotland.<sup>48</sup> In particular, the compilation ties together the experiences of Scottish emigrants to the New World and how their ordeals shaped both the myth and collective memory of Nova Scotia.

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<sup>45</sup> Adrian Alexander Willsher, 'Where are the roads?': *The Tourist and Industrial Promotion of Films of the Nova Scotia Film Bureau, 1845 - 1970*, MA Thesis, (Halifax, Dalhousie University, 1996).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 48 - 53.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>48</sup> Marjory Harper and Michael E. Vance, eds., *Myth, Migration, and the Making of Memory : Scotia and Nova Scotia, c. 1700 - 1990*, (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1999).

In their introduction, Vance and Harper argue that any attempt to discern the relationship between Scotland and Nova Scotia must start with looking at emigration. A highly organized system spearheaded by clergy and emigration agents, starting in the 1770s, was established to attract Scottish emigrants to the New World.<sup>49</sup> This movement to Nova Scotia was bolstered further by the 1815 - 1830s downturn in the Scottish economy, the emigration of military personnel, and an increase in the timber trade.<sup>50</sup>

However, the authors suggest that in Nova Scotia the construction of the collective memory of the Scottish influx and experience in the province has been distorted, reshaped, and replaced by the “commercial dictates of heritage.” This has taken precedence over those true indicators of culture, found in the “community’s oral traditions, the creation of literary artists, the concerns of political leadership or even the campaigns of various preservation movements.”<sup>51</sup> As such, the collection attempts to discern not only how such a tradition was created, but also what is the true Scottish experience. Here the authors point to the work of McKay and his study on the Nova Scotia Liberal Premier Angus L. Macdonald’s goal to impose the Scottish culture on his province. Portrayal of it as a haven of a displaced, traditional Scottish society has been well documented.

Harshly criticizing what has become the mainstream view of Scottish emigrants in

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 22 - 23.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

Nova Scotia, Vance and Harper conclude that the emergence of the “tartanization” of the province has belittled the Scots actual experience. They summarize

The “commodification of culture” that the contemporary heritage industry represents has had the effect of perpetuating distortions and trivialising the impact of Scottish settlement, ultimately producing tartan travesty in which Scottish identity has become little more than a series of marketable goods.<sup>52</sup>

What emerges is an important collection of essays which sift through the distortions to present the realistic experience to those Scots who moved to Nova Scotia. Two articles in particular, Michael Kennedy’s “Lochaber No More : A Critical Examination of Highland Emigration Mythology,” and Rusty Bitterman’s “On Remembering and Forgetting : Highland Memories Within the Maritime Diaspora,”<sup>53</sup> clearly demonstrate the need to carefully approach any construction of the Scots experience in Nova Scotia.

As Bitterman argues

to understand the construction of historical memory among Maritime Highlanders, we must be sensitive to how visions of the past changed over time as well as to the contested nature of that construction.<sup>54</sup>

Those constructing the collective memory of the experience of Nova Scotia, through such means as song and poetry were a select few. They included leaders in the Highland society, such as Roderick C. MacDonald, who rose to prominence by receiving support through a plea to ethnic loyalty. Constructing this memory, Bitterman states, is

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 267 - 297 and 253 - 265, respectively.

<sup>54</sup> Bitterman, p. 253.

concerned as much with exclusions as it is with inclusions.<sup>55</sup>

However, historians are not the only group interested in addressing questions of culture and identity. Geographers have examined implications arising from tangible changes in landscape and how such alterations influence cultural practices and portrayals of a region. This connection is addressed in depth by Shauna McCabe, who completed her doctoral degree at the University of British Columbia in 2001, focusing her studies on the impact of the construction of the Fixed Link to Prince Edward Island. Entitled “Romantic Notions? Representing the Space of “Island” in the Wake of the Fixed Link,”<sup>56</sup> her paper presented at the 1998 Atlantic Canada Studies Conference offers an examination of the landscape of the Island, and approaches landscape as a fluid concept that fundamentally changed with the replacement of the ferry system. This change in access to and from the Island, she argues, spawned a reaction against a possible fluxuation in the way the Island is viewed by both “insiders” and “outsiders” from its traditional perception as a quaint, simplistic and rural province. Using extensive testimony from cultural practitioners on the Island as her vehicle of analysis, McCabe looks at their involvement in resistance to the Fixed Link, and how such resistance influenced their work, as varied as theatre production, songs, visual art, and bumper stickers.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 253 - 259.

<sup>56</sup> Shauna McCabe, “Romantic Notions? Representing the Space of “Island” in the Wake of the Fixed Link,” Atlantic Canada Studies Conference, 1998.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5 - 6.

Aligning such forms of cultural expressions with their undoubted mass influence on the creation of the Island's collective memory, McCabe intertwines this creation and production of memory with a re-imagining of the malleable landscape of the Island.<sup>58</sup> A sense of "otherness" and "questioning the myth of progress" being those most prevalent ideas the Island's cultural producers wish to maintain. As McCabe concludes

Given the personal values and intentions, and the broader consciousness of historical relations and cultural production of Prince Edward Island, it seems these recent cultural practices challenging the development project must not be relegated to simply romantic nostalgic notions of an unattainable, antimodern "simple life." Within the context of the "historic swirl of culture, politics, economics and personality in a particular place at a particular time," they point, rather to the legitimacy and value of people's struggles to create their own places and memories, amounting to a questioning of an increasingly widespread rhetoric of placeness and detachment associated with modernity. Collectively, this recent work gives contemporary currency to myths of independence and rural self-sufficiency, in an effort to shape and influence the landscape and rural imaginary, locating the figure of the artist and role of collective memory at the centre of landscape meaning.<sup>59</sup>

Further, McCabe successfully argues

As both symbol and reality, landscape takes on meaning and assumes the weight of myth through the interaction of a range of cultural practice, such as narrative, visual accounts, song, poetry, drama, and folklore. Memory cannot lie outside this cultural practice, just as cultural practice cannot lie outside memory.<sup>60</sup>

It is easy to parallel Prince Edward Island's experience with the construction of a

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9 - 11.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Fixed Link to the construction of the Canso Causeway in Nova Scotia. Both structures replaced outdated ferry systems, improving access to both Islands. Both links are associated with creating a permanent interface or gateway to what many “insiders” view as traditional, simplistic, “other” societies. Finally, both structures represent the indelible signs of progress and modernity which have inevitably been overshadowed by the discourse of those citizens fighting, in a variety of ways, most evident through cultural production, to maintain their romanticized portrayals of the area, both inside and outside the region. While there have been numerous studies on cultural production in P.E.I. and Newfoundland,<sup>61</sup> little has been accomplished on Nova Scotia, despite such areas as Cape Breton’s diverse culture, exemplified through a variety of such works as the repertoire of the Rankin Family<sup>62</sup> and the collection of novels by Alistair MacLeod.<sup>63</sup> As will be

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<sup>61</sup> See James Overton who examines the notion of returning home which “represents tradition, the past, community, the sacred. In a temporary visit, one can celebrate the positive aspects of community, even though this may be a largely mythical community constructed in the memory of exile.” James Overton, “Coming Home : Nostalgia and Tourism in Newfoundland,” *Acadiensis*, Vol. XIV, No. 1, (Autumn 1984), p. 91. See as well his collection *Making a World of Difference : Essays on Tourism, Culture and Development in Newfoundland*, (St. John’s: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1996).

<sup>62</sup> For example, the lyrics of “Orangedale Whistle” discuss the modernization of Cape Breton Island : The station master looked all around/ Along the track both up and down / But the train could not be found / For there was neither sight nor sound.. / The winds of change forever grow / Some things stay and some things go... / But things saw change as time went by / people drive and people fly. My thanks to Kristie Gehue for bringing this reference to my attention.

<sup>63</sup> Mary Frances Finnigan has conducted a study on the literature of MacLeod and discusses the profound effect out migration and cultural identity have played in shaping and highlighting characteristics of the region. Mary Frances Finnigan, “ “To Live Somewhere Else” : Migration and Cultural Identity in Alistair MacLeod’s Fiction”

demonstrated, the construction of the Canso Causeway has also become part of the cultural legacy of Cape Breton. Therefore, there is a need to evaluate this structure within the cultural and social experience of Nova Scotia. It is hoped that this study will add to the growing scholarship of Atlantic Canada in the post war era.

## **Chapter Two: Roots: Laying the Groundwork for the Canso Causeway**



Anyone studying the economic future of Nova Scotia is likely to find himself [sic] vacillating between pessimism and optimism, between fear and hope.<sup>1</sup>

The construction of the Canso Causeway in the mid 1950s was one of many massive national reconstruction projects in Canada. This important project is best understood as one that fit the goals of development of post-war Canada. In order to understand the importance of the Canso Causeway not only to Nova Scotia, but also to Canada, the project must be contextualized. In order to do so we must turn our attention to the Depression era to comprehend the larger framework in which construction of the permanent link fits.

The crash of the New York stock market on October 24, 1929 triggered an international economic collapse and shattered the world's economy. Commonly known as "Black Friday," the 1929 crash signified the end of the "Roaring 20s," a decade characterized by years of fast economic growth, high investments, rising stock prices and optimism in worldwide markets that followed the end of First World War. Despite speculation that the economy was due for a downturn as part of its normal cycle, no one predicted that the world would fall victim to a complete economic collapse.

When the Depression hit, many political leaders believed it would be a temporary phenomenon. Few were prepared for the ensuing ten-year depression that only eased in

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<sup>1</sup> *Royal Commission on Provincial Development and Rehabilitation*, (Halifax: King's Printers 1944), p. 80.

1939 with the outbreak of the Second World War. Because of their inexperience in dealing with a depression of this magnitude, governments found themselves without the tools to deal with the crisis, thereby worsening the situation. At the same time, the Depression produced new theories about economies and government's role in society. The most revolutionary of these approaches is attributed to the highly influential British economist John Maynard Keynes.

By 1930 the devastating effects of the Great Depression were being felt throughout the world, and nowhere was this more evident than in Canada and the United States. In Canada, the collapse of exports, domestic investment, and world prices, the exploitation of newly developed industries in the 1920s that limited investment in certain areas in the 1930s, and the close economic ties between Canada and the United States all contributed to the severity of the crisis.<sup>2</sup> The Depression left Canada's economy reeling. Between 1929 and 1933 Gross National Expenditure plummeted by 42%, domestic investment by 11%, and demand for Canada's export of its staple products and goods and services plunged by half.<sup>3</sup> On May 1, 1933, the national unemployment estimate given to Conservative Prime Minister R.B. Bennett was 32.1% with approximately 15% of the nation's population dependent upon direct relief.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> A. E. Safarian, *The Canadian Economy in the Great Depression*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1970), pp. 15 - 17.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75 and Michael Horn, *The Dirty Thirties : Canadians in the Great Depression*, (Toronto: Copp Clark Publishing Company, 1972), pp. 3 - 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10 and 12.

Canada's response to the Depression was halting. Convinced that it was a temporary and self - correcting phenomena, newly elected Conservative Prime Minister Bennett remained reluctant to intervene in the economy.<sup>5</sup> Making good on an election promise, the Relief Act of 1930 provided a twenty million dollar relief grant for works to help the unemployed. However, Bennett proved unwilling to invest further in relief programs insisting instead on conservative economic measures to protect the country's economy.<sup>6</sup> Bennett chose to maintain a strictly protectionist policy that included high tariffs, maintaining a balanced budget and high taxation of both the provinces and municipalities.<sup>7</sup> His budget of 1931 reflected these policies and his belief that the Depression was temporary. Increasing the sales tax from 1 to 4%, corporate taxes from 8 to 10%, instituting higher tariffs, and ignoring cries to implement unemployment insurance, the Prime Minister believed that despite the current trend, Canada would soon reach "an era of true prosperity."<sup>8</sup> Convinced that these conservative policies would eventually correct the economy, Bennett remained reluctant to invest in major funds or new programs. Instead, the Prime Minister insisted the country wait for his government's

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<sup>5</sup> H. Blair Neatby, *The Politics of Chaos : Canada in the Thirties*, (Toronto: MacMillan, 1972), p. 57 - 58.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 56 - 7. This grant of twenty million dollars for relief grant was an unprecedented move by a federal government where, constitutionally, municipalities were in charge of unemployment relief.

<sup>7</sup> Horn, pp. 4 and 9.

<sup>8</sup> John Herd Thompson with Allan Seager, *Canada 1922 - 1939 : The Decades of Discord*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), p. 213.

initial policies to take effect. His approach to recovery was criticized by many who charged that he was ignoring international warnings that protectionist and conservative economic policies would not pave the way to recovery. In the House of Commons, the Prime Minister received news from his colleagues about economist John Maynard Keynes and his new theories of dealing with a depression.

John Maynard Keynes (1883 - 1946) is perhaps the best known economist of the twentieth century. He produced such influential works as *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1920), *A Treatise on Probability* (1930), and *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936). His approach to economics was an alternative to the traditional theories of the discipline. Athol Fitzgibbons argues that Keynes's unique methodology was "consciously cast as a third alternative to both Marxism and *laissez-faire*" and that his approach to economics was "a method rather than a set of patterns."<sup>9</sup> Keynes changed the way countries approached their economies, especially evident in his theories of the stabilization of employment and its relation to output, national income and employment, consumption and investments.<sup>10</sup> His theories about the role that the state played in society, especially during times of depression, revolutionized the world's approach to economics. The Keynesian approach to the economy focused on government investment in public works and the creation of

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<sup>9</sup> Athol Fitzgibbons, *Keynes's Vision : A New Political Economy*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 1 - 2 and R.M. O'Donnell, *Keynes : Philosophy, Economics and Politics*, (London: MacMillan Press, 1989), pp. 299 - 300.

<sup>10</sup> Fitzgibbons, pp. 607 - 613.

employment and involved the regulation of the market and control over economic development in the country. His approach to unemployment included an increase in government spending, investment in public works, and a lowering of taxes. R.M. O'Donnell argues that

Public works during depressions were not worthless, because they were partly or wholly 'wasteful' on commercial criteria. Rather than inactivity, it was better for the state to initiate some projects (even if mere pyramid building) but better still if these projects were directly useful; the building of social infrastructure could enrich society by alleviating involuntary employment and adding to the stock of national wealth.<sup>11</sup>

This approach was adopted to deal not only with the Depression, but with the post WWII transition from war to peace - time activity.<sup>12</sup> The fact that no post-war depression occurred was largely attributed to the adoption of Keynesian economics throughout Western society.<sup>13</sup>

Keynes's highly influential approach to the economy was eventually pursued by many nations, including Canada. Although slow to respond during the Depression, the Canadian Government eventually adopted a highly interventionist role in the economy when Keynes's theories swept across the world. Keynes suggested the need to increase public investments for a country's recovery.<sup>14</sup> In an article in *Atlantic Monthly* in May

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<sup>11</sup> O'Donnell, p. 305.

<sup>12</sup> Henry William Spiegel, *The Growth of Economic Thought*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1971), p. 607.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 607.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

1932, Keynes warned that the overwhelming propensity of governments to institute a decrease in wages and an increase in tariffs, were not the solution to the Depression. He warned that if governments did not resort to “increasing public investment, regardless of budgetary deficiencies” the only remaining solution was “to wait for a war to terminate a major depression.”<sup>15</sup>

In 1935 Bennett and his government finally attempted to pursue “increased centralization in the federal system and increased government intervention in economic affairs.”<sup>16</sup> Finally resigning himself to the necessary expansion of government’s role in Canadian society, the Prime Minister took to the airwaves in an approach dubbed “Bennett’s New Deal.”<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately for the Prime Minister, the government, for the most part, remained without concrete legislation and was unclear on how this increased involvement of the federal government in society was to be implemented. This lack of response left Bennett open to criticism and Liberal leader William Lyon Mackenzie King attacked the Prime Minister for being unprepared to pursue this increased responsibility

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<sup>15</sup> “The World’s Economic Outlook,” *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 149, pp. 521 - 26 quoted and discussed in Thompson and Seager, p. 217.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>17</sup> The name was based on the United States response to the Depression, under President F.D. Roosevelt, Radio addresses explaining his 1933 “New Deal” were also aimed at increasing public morale. This New Deal approach included declaration of a bank holiday and the institution of agencies to help provide work relief throughout the U. S., such as the Public Works Administration (PWA) that employed men to work throughout the country; and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) that represented the first attempt in North America to control agriculture prices.; and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) that employed men under the age of 25 to make campgrounds, national parks, and cut tress.

of government with new legislation.

When legislation did finally materialize it included the creation and centralization of several national agencies. However, despite some legislation having a lasting impact on Canada's social and economic structure, with five long years into the Depression it proved to be too little too late for Bennett. In 1934, the Bank of Canada was established to deal with monetary policy and to regulate and direct the nation's economy. The marketing of wheat received federal government assistance early in the Depression and laid the groundwork for the Canadian Wheat Board established in 1935 to assist in and to regulate the marketing of wheat.<sup>18</sup> The federal government's expenditure on direct relief and relief programs rose from 18 million in 1931 to 159 million in 1934.<sup>19</sup> But as H.B. Neatby argues, because of Canada's experience during the Depression

the greater expansion of government activity has been in social welfare. Family allowances, old age pensions, unemployment insurance, medicare these are all attempts to reduce economic insecurity in an industrial society. The depression made this (economic) insecurity painfully apparent and made clear the need for government welfare measures.<sup>20</sup>

This intervention meant that the federal government assumed more responsibility in many previously unregulated sectors of Canadian society. The 1935 Employment and Insurance Act signified the assumption of federal control in such areas as health insurance and minimum wage.

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<sup>18</sup> Horn, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> Safarian, Table 27, p. 155.

<sup>20</sup> Neatby, pp. 187 - 8.

Canada's delayed response to the Depression crisis also pointed to deeply entrenched problems in the country's constitutional structure. During the Depression, Canada found itself unable to establish efficient relief programs to deal with the social and economic dislocation sweeping the country. Canada's constitutional provisions put municipal governments in charge of relief but, in reality, left these lower levels of government without the fiscal means to institute effective relief programs. This constitutional problem was at the center of the country's inability to deal effectively with the Depression.

This subject has been explored in depth by E.R. Forbes, whose work focuses on the Maritime provinces during the decades of the 1920s and the 1930s. In two articles "The 1930s : Depression and Retrenchment" and " 'Cutting the Pie into Smaller Pieces' : Matching Grants and Relief in the Maritime Provinces," Forbes discusses the economic, political and social chaos that resulted from the Great Depression.<sup>21</sup> He argues that the Maritimes had virtually no means of instituting welfare or relief programs because of problems inherent in the Canadian Constitution. Severe lack of resources and funding left Maritime municipalities unable to deal with the Great Depression. Lacking the funds to match federal grants for relief or for such programs as old age pensions, the

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<sup>21</sup> E.R. Forbes, "The 1930s: Depression and Retrenchment," *Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, eds. E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise, (Toronto and Fredericton: University of Toronto Press and Acadiensis Press, 1993), pp. 272 - 305 and Forbes " 'Cutting the Pie into Smaller Pieces' : Matching Grants and Relief in the Maritime Provinces during the 1930s" *Labour and Working Class History in Atlantic Canada : A Reader*, eds. David Frank and Gregory S. Kealey, (Institute of Social and Economic Research : Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1995), pp. 300 - 321.



municipalities were ill equipped to deal with the poverty sweeping through the region.

[M]ore limited economic resources [resulted in the Maritimes] inability to participate more effectively in the federal government's relief programs. The matching grants formulas in the federal government's programs would have been fair, if all the provinces had possessed equal wealth. But since their resources varied dramatically, the poorer provinces either had to commit a much greater percentage of their funds to a given program or deny to their citizens the benefits conspicuously available elsewhere.<sup>22</sup>

Further, what little forthcoming available relief the government had at its disposal during the Depression was channelled into "roads and relief." However, this strategy of the federal government failed to institute real economic planning and development, merely providing temporary relief.<sup>23</sup>

Consequently, the Great Depression forced the re-imagining of the federal government's role and responsibilities in society. The disastrous decade of the 1930s made a closer examination of constitutional roles and powers necessary. An examination of the Canadian federal system was addressed in the 1937 Royal Commission on Dominion - Provincial Relations, reporting its findings 3 years later in 1940. However, before this national Royal Commission was appointed, the province of Nova Scotia was busy making clear its own position within the country.

By the mid 1930s, the Nova Scotia government began to examine closely the

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<sup>22</sup> Forbes, " 'Cutting the Pie into Smaller Pieces,' " pp. 300 - 301.

<sup>23</sup> R.A. Young, "Maritimes Rise to War," eds. Norman Hilmer, Robert Bothwell, Roger Sarty, Claude Beauregard, *A Country of Limitations : Canada and the World in 1939*, (Ottawa: Canadian Committee for the History of the Second World War, 1996), p. 152.

province's position in the national and regional economy. The 1934 *Report of the Royal Commission on Provincial Economic Inquiry* investigated the province's financial affairs and her position within Canada. The Commission was composed of British economist John Henry Jones, Professor and Head of Economics at the University of Leeds, Alexander S. Johnson, former Canadian Deputy Minister of Marine, and Harold A. Innes, Professor of Economics at the University of Toronto. Otherwise known as the Jones Commission, it sought to address and give close examination to the "fiscal and trade policies" of Canada, the "adequacy of Dominion - Provincial financial arrangements and any other matter affecting the economic welfare of Nova Scotia."<sup>24</sup> The report claimed to be "undoubtedly the most comprehensive effort yet made by any province to take stock of its economic situation" and as such was an important step for the province in addressing its fiscal position within the country.<sup>25</sup>

After three months of deliberations throughout the province the final report was released on December 4, 1934 and outlined the economic burden Nova Scotia carried within the Dominion. The Commission found that the federal government needed to take a more active and interventionist role in the direction and support of the province's economic growth. This was necessary to offset negative policies that hurt the prosperity of Nova Scotia's industries. The report stated, for example, that national tariff policies

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<sup>24</sup> *The Report of the Royal Commission on Provincial Economic Inquiry*, (Halifax: Provincial Secretary King's Printer's, 1934), p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> *The Jones Report on Nova Scotia's Economic Welfare Withing Confederation : A Digest Prepared by the Government of Nova Scotia*, (Nova Scotia, 1935), p. 5.

“tended to retard the growth of exporting industries (...) without providing adequate compensation in other directions” and that such policies “reacted injuriously upon the welfare of Nova Scotia.”<sup>26</sup> Although the Commission concluded that central Canadian economic policies critically hindered the economic pursuits of the Maritimes, the report cleared the central provinces of any intentional wrong - doing. The report suggested that “Central Canadian manufacturers merely pursued the policy that they would have under similar circumstances in any other part of Canada.”<sup>27</sup> The Commission’s findings recommended that compensation be provided to Maritime industries in order to ensure their ability to compete effectively in Canada.

Further examination of the financial arrangement between the Dominion and the Provinces revealed the present arrangements to be “unsatisfactory.” Referring to the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Maritime Claims in 1926,<sup>28</sup> the Jones Commission advocated the granting of subsidies based on fiscal need. The report found that despite the province’s best fiscal efforts, federal government subsidies to the province proved insufficient and therefore Nova Scotia needed more monetary consideration.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *The Royal Commission on Provincial Economic Inquiry*, p. 79.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>29</sup> Kenneth Gary Jones, *Response to Regional Disparity in the Maritime Provinces, 1926 - 42 : A Study in Canadian Governmental Relations*, MA Thesis, (Fredericton: University of New Brunswick, 1980), p. 82.

Nova Scotia's financial difficulties were to be alleviated through the central government as the commissioners reiterated the necessity of determining federal subsidies on the basis of actual need. Essentially the commissioners were trying to get at the problem of a Canada that was national in encouraging the development and centralization of industry but provincial when it came to paying for social services.<sup>30</sup>

One major recommendation of the Jones Commission was that Nova Scotia establish a provincial council to help oversee and direct all aspects of the Nova Scotian economy.<sup>31</sup> As a result, the Nova Scotia Economic Council was established in December, 1935, tabling the first of its eight yearly reports in 1936. Headed by its secretary George V. Haythorne, the Council included various university representatives, businessmen, and industry representatives from across the province. Its mandate as an advisory body was to carry out "inquiries into various matters affecting the economic life of the province" and report its findings to the provincial government.<sup>32</sup> These reports became important components of the province's economic development strategy to attract and promote industry in the province.

The Nova Scotia Economic Council reports dealt with ways to enhance Nova Scotia's economic activity on the local, national and international levels. Among other things, they examined ways to increase cod exports to Cuba, investigated the state of Dominion - Provincial Fiscal relations, and planned for the improvement of highways, roads and railways throughout the province. Although the establishment of the

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<sup>30</sup> Forbes, "Depression and Retrenchment," p. 299.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 88 - 90.

<sup>32</sup> *Nova Scotia Economic Council*, Book I, 1936, p. 4.

Commission was an important initial step in addressing provincial economic concerns and steering its growth, it was soon rudderless : by the early 1940s it was without a secretary and a chairman, its activities overshadowed by the war effort in Europe.

In the wake of the Jones Commission and the establishment of the Nova Scotia Economic Council a major national Royal Commission attempted a complete synopsis of Canada's overall position since Confederation. On May 3, 1940 the Royal Commission on Dominion Provincial Relations tabled its report after three years of labourious inquiries. Otherwise known as the Rowell - Sirois Commission, the report sought to "re-examine the economic and financial basis of Confederation and the distribution of legislative powers in the light of economic and social developments of the previous seventy years."<sup>33</sup> The Rowell Sirois Commission examined constitutional allocation, taxes, public expenditures and subsidies for the provinces.<sup>34</sup> It was the first national attempt to assess the position of the provinces since Confederation. As J.L. Granatstein notes, its report was significant because

[it] was notably the first detailed history of the Canadian economy (... ) the first full study of the effects of the tariff on the different regions and a concise and clear examination of the effects the National Policy had - and had not - had.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission on Dominion - Provincial Relations*, Book I, (Ottawa: Queen's Printers, 1940), p. 13.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> J.L. Granatstein, *The Ottawa Men : The Civil Service Mandarins, 1935 - 1957*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 156.

The Rowell - Sirois Commission advocated the National Adjustments Grant under which the federal government would give the provincial government subsidies based on fiscal need.<sup>36</sup> The Commission echoed the conclusions of the 1934 Jones Commission that stated a reassessment of fiscal policies was necessary to bring regional equality to the Maritimes. It argued for a redistribution of finances based on fiscal need. The province advocated centralization in the federal government to counterbalance regional fiscal disparities that resulted in different standards of social services. The Commission recommended that the federal government assume responsibility for unemployment insurance and old age pensions, with the provinces retaining jurisdiction for health care and worker's compensation.<sup>37</sup> As Kenneth Jones argues the commission advocated centralization as a *sine quo non* in dealing with unemployment.<sup>38</sup> This was important because it "placed squarely upon the shoulders of the federal government's shoulders the responsibility for maintaining the nation's economic and social conditions."<sup>39</sup>

In 1944 the *Royal Commission on Provincial Development and Rehabilitation* tabled its report. The Commission's mandate was to provide a blueprint for Canadian economic recovery after the war with each province submitting its own reports for

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<sup>36</sup> *The Royal Commission on Dominion - Provincial Relations*, pp. 125 - 130.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, Book II, pp. 24 - 43.

<sup>38</sup> Jones, p. 149.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts and projects. Nova Scotia's submission to the Commission detailed its plans to help revive the coal and steel industries and develop other complimentary sectors of the economy, such as tourism. The inquiry's aim was to oversee a "study of the possibilities of developing Nova Scotia's industries and natural resources," including a study of economic resources and "certain other urgent social problems."<sup>40</sup>

Discussing the current economic situation of the province, the report stated that economic developments elsewhere in the country had resulted in disastrous effects for the province. Perhaps more importantly, the report noted that the position of Nova Scotia in Confederation had deteriorated. It reiterated the recommendations of the Rowell Sirois Commission that although its "proposals were not accepted ... the conditions which gave rise to the report are still present and will probably become even more claimant after the war."<sup>41</sup> It noted that regional disparities remained a problem that "will be even greater in the future."<sup>42</sup> As for the future economic development of Nova Scotia, the Commission noted

The province can make few plans in detail when the two most important items remain unknown, namely, what is the Dominion prepared to do itself in these plans and what will be the financial position of the province after the war.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *Nova Scotia Report to the Royal Commission on Provincial Development and Rehabilitation*, 1944, p. 27.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 45 - 6.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

The report took issue with the national tariff that had previously been condemned in previous Royal Commissions. It described the tariff as “one of the most serious factors” in the economic underdevelopment of the province’s economy, where the “accumulation of capital” centered in the “central provinces largely at the expense of the extremes.”<sup>44</sup>

The high level of dependence of Cape Breton’s coal and steel industries upon the federal government for survival was addressed by the report. The Commission concluded that a single industry environment was a dangerous economic environment and was not a desirable position for any region. It created a volatility that required, as its solution, the expansion into other areas for economic development.<sup>45</sup> The Commission discussed the unstable and dangerous dependence of the province on the “marginal” coal and steel industries that were then suffering in the international market.<sup>46</sup> The competitive position of these industries worsened throughout the war when the federal government developed a “new industrial machine” in central Canada. While increasing the “economic and political power” of Central Canada, the report argued, the policies of the federal government “produced few results that seem likely to elevate the province from the marginal position it has occupied for so long within the federation.”<sup>47</sup>

In its “Iron and Steel” report, the Commission noted that these industries “should

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.



have a reasonably assured future”<sup>48</sup> if changes took place both within the industry itself and its supporting industries. Labour productivity would have to rise and transportation would have to be improved upon before the steel industry would again become competitive in Canada.<sup>49</sup> Throughout the war, the coal and steel industries experienced strikes and slow downs by workers fighting for union recognition and an increase in wages, such as the miners slowdown strike of 1941.<sup>50</sup> Hoping to increase the steel industry’s competitiveness in Canada, the Commission recommended overall improvements in the industry’s facilities and transportation.<sup>51</sup>

Seeking to introduce new economic alternatives for Cape Breton, the Commission paid considerable attention to the tourist industry. It encouraged the development of highways and secondary roads, advocated subsidized rail for cheap travel, suggested the construction of provincial parks and travel routes, and the reconstruction of the Fortress of Louisbourg. All would help to attract tourists to Cape Breton Island.<sup>52</sup> Both the 1944 Commission on Provincial Development and Rehabilitation and the 1946 Royal Commission on Coal promoted the idea of tourism in conjunction with the decline of the

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, “Report on Iron and Steel,” p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Earle, “ ‘Down with Hitler and Silby Barrett’ : The Cape Breton Miners Slowdown Strike of 1941,” *Acadiensis*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1 (Autumn 1988), pp. 56 - 90.

<sup>51</sup> *Nova Scotia Report*, “Report on Transportation,” p. 17.

<sup>52</sup> *Nova Scotia Report*, “Report on Tourism,” pp. 2 - 25.

coal and steel industries to serve as a complementary sector to an economy whose future welfare relied upon much needed diversification.

In 1946, a federal Royal Commission was instructed to look into the coal industry in Canada. Headed by Chief Justice Carroll, the Commission studied the coal industry in each province and produced a plethora of recommendations for its improvement. The report recognized that Nova Scotia was in a unique position in relation to its coal industry, noting that “the problems of Nova Scotia coal mining are more serious than those of the industry in any other part of Canada.”<sup>53</sup> The report examined Cape Breton's reliance on a single industry, one that even in wartime required continual federal subsidies in order to survive. Without continuing federal assistance and transportation subsidies, the industry would be “unable to support” the estimated 100,000 people who depended upon it. Furthermore, its collapse would mean complete “social and economic dislocation” for the Island.<sup>54</sup>

The significance of the special wartime assistance to Nova Scotia operators, ... is that it appears impossible that this assistance can be terminated within any short period of time without a collapse of production and employment. It appears unlikely that the industry can even return to its pre-war position without major changes in organization.<sup>55</sup>

The Commission reported that Nova Scotia's production of coal had peaked in

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<sup>53</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission on Coal, 1946*, (Ottawa: King's Printers, 1947), p. 590.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 582.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 590.

1931, and did not anticipate a return to these levels.<sup>56</sup> In light of these findings the Commission feared continued decline of the industry. Its recommendations for the coal industry included interim support for miners and massive reorganization. Cape Breton remained as one of the more volatile economies in the country. The historical reliance upon this industry inevitably further entrenched the extremely unstable economic environment in Cape Breton. Unfortunately, the recommendations of the Royal Commission were never implemented.

By the end of the war in 1945 the Nova Scotia economy, especially that of Cape Breton was in a dire situation. The need to diversify in order to promote and ensure the region's future was necessary. The province was forced to look towards post war projects that would help encourage employment and a future for the province's industries. Under the influence of Keynesian economics and the rise of government intervention in the economy, Canada looked to reconstruction projects throughout the country, well before the end of the war, to promote economic recovery. Atlantic Canada's provinces were attempting to take control of their economic future.

New Brunswick's post - war position is well documented by historian R.A. Young who traces the trend of state intervention from the 1930s to the reconstruction era, immediately following the Second World War. Under Premier J.B. McNair, the government established a Committee on Reconstruction to help direct the province's post - war economic planning. The Committee held hearings and accepted briefs from

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

associations as diverse as municipalities, boards of trade, fishermen and farmer's groups.<sup>57</sup> The calls were for development in such areas as marketing of crops, fish and forest products and demand for plant, storage and warehouses to cater to these demands.<sup>58</sup>

The Committee's final report provided for mass expenditures worth \$43 million on public works (spent mostly on highway construction and repair) and extensive development and promotion of primary and secondary industries. This included development of electric power throughout the province<sup>59</sup> and, secondary to this, improvements in research facilities, marketing and transportation. All discussions revolved around the province's need for a close working relationship between business and the state.<sup>60</sup>

Such post war policies epitomized Keynesian economic theories by the federal government marking its role through increased spending in order to "modernize" the region.<sup>61</sup> High levels of government intervention highlighted the 1950s. Described by

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<sup>57</sup> R.A. Young, " 'and the people will sink into despair' : Reconstruction in New Brunswick, 1942 - 1952," *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. LXIX (June 1988), p. 136.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 138 - 139.

<sup>59</sup> R.A. Young, "Planning for Power : The New Brunswick Electric Power Commission in the 1950s," *Acadiensis*, Vol. XII, No. 1 (Autumn 1982), pp. 73 - 90.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 142 - 144.

<sup>61</sup> For discussion surrounding the concepts of modernizing the region through infrastructure and other such projects see Margaret Conrad "The 1950s: The Decade of Development," *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, eds., E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) pp. 382 - 420; Margaret Conrad "The Atlantic Revolution of the 1950s," *Beyond Anger and Longing : Community and Development in Atlantic Canada*, ed., Berkeley Flemming, (Fredericton: Center for

historian W.S. MacNutt as the “Atlantic Revolution,”<sup>62</sup> the period marked “the dramatic nature of the economic and social changes occurring during the decade.”<sup>63</sup> As Margaret Conrad summarizes

Working through such organization as the Maritime Provinces Board of Trade, the Maritime Transportation Commission, co-operative organizations, provincial federations of labour, the region’s universities, and various quasi-government agencies, they turned to their provincial governments for action and counselled self - help and co-operation to overcome their common problems. Pressed by departmental experts and by public opinion, Atlantic Premiers gradually accepted what was becoming the conventional wisdom of the age : that state planning was the only alternative to economic backwardness, and that federal aid was the necessary condition for the success of such planning.”<sup>64</sup>

Leaders of communities petitioned for increased federal government involvement in the economy, believed to be the means of creating the ideal environment for economic prosperity and stability in the Maritimes. In many ways reminiscent of the 1920s Maritime Rights Movement, the Atlantic Revolution was a struggle to gain improved economic and social conditions.<sup>65</sup>

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Canadian Studies and Acadiensis Press, 1988), pp. 55 - 96; Della Stanley “The 1960s : The Illusions and Realities of Progress,” *Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, pp. 421 - 459; Young “ ‘and the people will sink into despair’ .”; Young “Planning for Power : The New Brunswick Electric Power Commission in the 1950s,” pp. 73 - 99; and Young “Development Planning and Participation in New Brunswick, 1945 - 1975,” D.Phil. Thesis (Oxford University, 1979).

<sup>62</sup> W.S. MacNutt, “The Atlantic Revolution,” *Atlantic Advocate* (June 1957), pp. 11 - 13.

<sup>63</sup> Conrad, “The 1950s : The Decade of Development,” p. 401.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 402 and Conrad, “The Atlantic Revolution of the 1950s,” p. 60.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 401 - 413 and *Ibid.*

It is therefore easy to see how a project such as the Canso Causeway fits into the aims of Nova Scotia in the post war era, finding resonance in both the goals of the Atlantic Revolution and the reconstruction era. The primary aim of reconstruction projects was to ease the transition to a post war economy. Projects like the Canso Causeway would serve the needs of post-war Canada, Nova Scotia and especially Cape Breton Island, by both easing the economy's transition and providing much needed employment opportunities, if only short term, for returning veterans.

### **Chapter Three: Reconstruction: The Canso Causeway, the Region, and Nation Building**

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Some historians tell you that Canada was united in 1867; those in Newfoundland set the date at 1949. But any enlightened Cape Bretoner will let you know that Canada will not be united until the Canso Causeway is completed in late 1954.<sup>1</sup>

The opening of the Canso Causeway on August 13, 1955 marked one of the most significant days in the history of the province of Nova Scotia. Connecting mainland Nova Scotia to Cape Breton Island, this permanent link was the result of decades of political debates, engineering surveys, Royal Commissions, a House of Commons Special Committee, and intense lobbying by provincial politicians and the province's citizens. One of many reconstruction initiatives in Canada, the completion of the Canso Causeway was the most significant rehabilitation project in Nova Scotia of the post-war era. Under the leadership of Liberal Prime Ministers Mackenzie King and Louis St. Laurent, the 1940s and 1950s witnessed such massive national projects as the St. Lawrence Seaway and the TransCanada Highway. In Nova Scotia, the completion of the Causeway across the Strait of Canso and the Angus L. Macdonald Bridge, connecting the cities of Dartmouth and Halifax across the entrance to the Bedford Basin, were two major rehabilitation efforts. The Causeway replaced the inefficient ferry system that had been in place for over seventy-five years. The Angus L. Macdonald Bridge also marked an improvement in transportation efficiency and consequently an explosive growth for the city of Halifax - Dartmouth.

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Pelrine, "Canso Gets Its Causeway," *Oval*, Vol. 22, No. 6, (December 1953), p. 8.

Although concrete action leading to the construction of the Causeway did not surface until 1943, the first public recommendation for a link joining Cape Breton Island and mainland Nova Scotia was made on September 1, 1901. During an interview at the Windsor Hotel in Montreal, J.A. Gillies, former Member of Parliament for Richmond, declared that engineering survey plans were under way to explore the possibility of bridging the Strait to replace both the *S.S. Mulgrave*, the ferry that had been providing train and vehicular service across the Strait of Canso for 25 years, and the *Scotia I*, added in 1901 to improve transportation service across the Strait.<sup>2</sup> Engineering plans directed at replacing the two ferries with a permanent link were completed by Hiram Donkin, former General Manager of the Dominion Coal Company in the same year.<sup>3</sup> Encouraged by Gillies' declaration and Donkin's completed engineering plans, four Nova Scotia businessmen incorporated the Canso Bridge Company on May 15, 1902. The company received support from local Cape Breton organizations, such as the North Sydney Board of Trade.<sup>4</sup> Obvious public support for the construction of a bridge was declared in an editorial in the *Sydney Post* on March 15, 1902 entitled "Ferry Steamer Scotia" that said

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<sup>2</sup> Laurence J. Doucet, *The Road to the Isle : The Canso Causeway - Deepest in the World*, 2nd ed. (Fredericton: University of New Brunswick Press, 1955), n.p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8 - 9. The four businessmen were Alex Cross of Sydney, Robert G. Reid of Montreal, Graham Fraser of New Glasgow, and Hiram Donkin of Antigonish and Halifax.

“a bridge across the Strait is what is wanted.”<sup>5</sup> While the early history of the Canso project involved much public support, it produced no real results. Even though in 1915 the ferry *Scotia II* replaced the *S.S. Mulgrave*, no further plans for a permanent link were advanced for many years.

During the Second World War the Government of Canada oversaw planning, reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts at both the national and provincial levels. The Federal Department of Reconstruction, created in 1944, merged in December 1945 with the Department of Munitions and Supply, to become the Department of Reconstruction and Supply. Existing as such until 1951, this Ministry’s aim was to direct and manage reconstruction efforts throughout the country. C.D. Howe, head of the Department of Munitions and Supply from 1940, saw the ministry through the amalgamation of the two departments and would direct the newly created department’s activities until 1948. The war prompted the emergence of a more active and interventionist Canadian federal government in matters relating to the economy. Unfortunately for the Maritime provinces, wartime economic policy systematically limited the region’s economic growth and prosperity after the war. Under Howe’s leadership the Department would direct its support toward Central Canadian industries while simultaneously and systematically denying contracts for industrial development in the Maritimes,<sup>6</sup> continuing to favor the

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<sup>5</sup> “Ferry Steamer Scotia,” *Sydney Post*, March 15, 1902, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> E.R. Forbes, “Consolidating Disparity: The Maritimes and the Industrialization of Canada During the Second World War,” *Acadiensis*, Vol. XV, No. 2 (Spring 1986), pp. 3

industrial development of Central Canada over that of the Maritimes. Under the tight controls of C.D. Howe, who believed “the decline of industry” in the Maritimes to be “inevitable,” sectors such as the steel industry suffered harshly at the hands of his ministry.<sup>7</sup> Although Forbes argues that “(t)here was, of course, no conspiracy to de-industrialize the Maritimes,”<sup>8</sup> Howe consistently granted industrial contracts to the steel mill in Sault Ste. Marie over the Dosco corporation in Sydney. Despite the presence of four Federal ministers in King’s war cabinet from the Maritimes, including the highly influential former and future Liberal Premier of Nova Scotia Angus L. Macdonald, there was a persistent lack of industrial contracts for the region. Although the work of Royal Commissions, such as the Royal Commission on Dominion - Provincial Relations in 1940, recommended measures to end regional disparities, the Maritimes’ experience during the war only further entrenched inequalities. Despite the Maritimes’ failure during the war to gain its fair share of industrial contracts, Howe’s Department encouraged national rehabilitation projects for the post - war era. After the war, the Department examined reconstruction projects in each province to help ease the transition from a war - time to peace - time economy. In fact, part of the Ministry’s post - war reconstruction mandate commenced well before the end of the war.

Subsequent to the Province of Nova Scotia recommending the bridging of the

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26 - 27.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

Strait project as their highest priority in 1943, a Special Committee on Reconstruction and Re-establishment was convened on May 21, 1943 to study the possibility of constructing a permanent link. The aim of the Committee and the duty of the witnesses were to address the “question of further development of the coal industry of Nova Scotia, and in particular with transportation, especially having regard to . . . the bottleneck of transportation at the Canso Strait.”<sup>9</sup> The hearing, headed by Members of the House of Commons, lasted for just over two hours, during which time the Committee heard from two expert witnesses testifying in their areas of expertise. The experts were D.W. McLachlan from the Federal Department of Transport, who was in charge of designs and constructions, and S.W. Fairweather, the Chief of Research and Development for Canadian National Railways (CNR).

McLachlan, in his capacity as a professional engineer, concentrated his testimony on what form of a permanent link would be most appropriate for the Strait of Canso. He addressed the logistics of constructing each of three proposed forms of connection: a bridge, a causeway, or a tunnel. McLachlan testified that the cost of constructing a tunnel and a bridge were excessive. Both projects presented severe engineering problems. He dismissed the feasibility of constructing a bridge, citing potential problems posed by the unique tides and ice conditions created by the Atlantic Ocean. As for the tunnel, he noted the possible existence of unstable faults at what would have to be the structure's

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<sup>9</sup> *Special Committee on Reconstruction and Re-Establishment*, “Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence,” No. 15, May 21, 1943, p. 387.

minimum depth of 150 feet.<sup>10</sup> Estimating the cost of a tunnel and a bridge at \$8,000,000 and \$22,000,000 respectively, the cost of a causeway estimated at \$10,000,000 did not present, in McLachlan's opinion, the significant engineering risks that would be encountered with the other two structures. Claiming that the causeway was the most feasible option, he testified that the sort of engineering feat required would be "very special" and that there was no other "job in the universe like it."<sup>11</sup> Owing to its unique geographic position, the construction would be the first of its kind, resulting in unknown tidal and environmental effects on the Strait.

Testifying on behalf of Canadian National Railways, Fairweather examined transportation problems posed by the existing ferry system, especially the slow export of coal off the Island caused by the rail traffic bottleneck at the Strait of Canso. He stated that the present ferry system across the Strait of Canso was uneconomical due to the delay of ferrying trains across the Strait and that the construction of a bridge, a causeway or a tunnel was far more beneficial for CNR. The transportation delays forced CNR to import coal from sections of the United States into the Maritimes because it was unable to obtain this natural resource at a competitive rate from Cape Breton.<sup>12</sup> The higher rate, due to transportation costs, was a direct result of the additional time it took getting coal off the Island. This dovetailed with McLachlan's testimony that the present facilities required

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 388 and 394.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 390.

about seven and a half hours to move a freight train from one side of the Strait to the other.<sup>13</sup>

The idea of a permanent link reinforced other reconstruction issues addressed by the Special Committee. Putting “men to work after the war where they will give a return to the country and be working instead of receiving the dole,” was a prime concern of the Committee.<sup>14</sup> While generally concerned with solving the transportation problems at the Strait of Canso, two members of the Committee, Mr. Neilson and Mr. Gillis, recognized that “it is the duty of this committee to find work in the post - war period.” Construction of a project of such immense proportions would create employment for thousands of veterans for several years.<sup>15</sup> Fairweather estimated that any one of the three projects would create approximately 7,000 jobs over a period of three years.

Recommendations from the Committee on Reconstruction and Re-Establishment implied the need for the federal government to play an active role in the development of the welfare state. In the decades following WWII, creating employment for Nova Scotians was an important priority of government Royal Commissions and related fact-finding initiatives. Faced with post war economic dislocation and an increase in labour

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 398.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 393.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 400.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 400 and 404.

disputes such as the 1941 miners slowdown strike in Cape Breton,<sup>16</sup> the federal government needed to inject jobs and industrial development into the Island. A massive project like the Causeway would serve these purposes. It would create employment and attract industry to the Island by creating a more efficient transportation system. At the end of the proceedings, both the CNR and the Department of Transport recommended that feasibility studies be carried out and completed by 1946, in order to confirm what structure was best suited for the Strait of Canso.

After the conclusion of the Special Committee on Reconstruction and Re-Establishment in 1943, another Royal Commission offered support for the construction of a permanent link. Under the chairmanship of Robert McGregor Dawson, a prominent political scientist from the University of Toronto, the *Royal Commission on Provincial Development and Rehabilitation* tabled its report in 1944. The Commission reported, among its other findings, that transportation in Nova Scotia “must be improved before the industry [iron and steel] can hold its own against competition either within or without the Dominion.”<sup>17</sup> The Commission found that “the construction of a bridge or causeway (..) seem(s) admirably designed both to provide long - term employment and to achieve an

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<sup>16</sup> Michael Earle, ““Down with Hitler and Silby Barrett”: The Cape Breton Miners’ Slowdown Strike of 1941,” *Acadiensis*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1 (Autumn 1988), pp. 56 - 90.

<sup>17</sup> “Report on Iron and Steel,” *The Nova Scotia Report to the Royal Commission on Provincial Development and Rehabilitation*, 1944, p. 54.



end which is probably justifiable on economic as well as on other grounds.”<sup>18</sup> A project such as this was necessary to support a reliable and effective connection for Canadian National Railway from Sydney to Moncton. Recommending the improvement of transportation facilities, the Commission hoped that a crossing at the Strait of Canso, would stimulate economic growth in the traditional sector of steel and coal, and help to improve and expand the tourist industry. The Commission recommended upgrading the facilities at the steel plant, thereby rendering it more cost efficient and competitive.<sup>19</sup> It also called for substantial improvements in tourist facilities and highways throughout the province, the addition of provincial parks, and the reconstruction of the Fortress of Louisbourg.<sup>20</sup>

Angus L. Macdonald, Liberal Premier of Nova Scotia, was one of the most active advocates of a crossing at the Strait of Canso. He had returned to Halifax in 1945 to resume the premiership after having served as Federal Minister of National Defense for Naval Services since 1940. The permanent Canso connection became the most prominent post-war rehabilitation project in the province, and Macdonald its strongest proponent. The Premier provided a continuous source of encouragement for development of the link, hoping to boost economic development and tourism in Cape Breton. In his efforts to inject much needed infrastructure and employment into the

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, “Report on Transportation,” p. 21.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, “Report on the Steel Industry,” p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, “Report on the Tourist Industry,” Recommendations, numbers 2, 9, 25, and

province, "Angus L.," as he was affectionately known throughout the province, consistently pressured the federal government to support the Canso project. As both the chief negotiator and the symbolic head of the causeway campaign for the link, he was continuously consulted by local lobby groups in Cape Breton and insisted on being included in all federal - provincial discussions.

Local organizations such as the Canso Causeway Association and the Associated Boards of Trade maintained a running correspondence with the Premier on every aspect of the Canso project. Continuous updates came from local businessmen John E. McCurdy, President of the Associated Boards of Trade of Cape Breton Island and Laurence J. Doucet, Secretary - Treasurer of the Associated Boards of Trade. McCurdy wrote to Macdonald in November 1945 informing him of the "considerable progress" the Boards of Trade had made "in furthering the Strait of Canso crossing project." Citing the meetings that had taken place in Sydney with Alexander S. MacMillan, Macdonald's predecessor, McCurdy stated that a "definite plan of action was drafted."<sup>21</sup> Macdonald would continue correspondence with the Associated Boards of Trade and the Canso Causeway Association over the years.

Established in 1948, the Canso Crossing Association was proposed by Doucet who became its Secretary upon the group's formation. The aim of the proposal was to

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<sup>21</sup> Letter from John E. McCurdy, President of the Associated Boards of Trade of Cape Breton Island to Angus L. Macdonald, Premier of Nova Scotia, November 13, 1945, PANS MG 2, Vol. 981, Folder 1 / 2.

amalgamate and coordinate Cape Breton lobby groups into one organization.<sup>22</sup> A publication in 1948 by the Canso Crossing Association entitled *The Permanent Crossing Over the Strait of Canso* outlined the organization's objectives. Claiming no political affiliation, its primary objective was to

lead and co-ordinate the efforts of all those sympathetic to this project as a paramount factor in developing freer trade, in the advancement of industry, the promotion of employment and the establishment of better understanding between the people of Cape Breton and their fellow Canadians.<sup>23</sup>

The group, comprising various representatives from the business and commercial communities of Cape Breton, would over the years grow in prominence and in its support of a crossing at the Strait. Relentless in its efforts, the Canso Crossing Association would lead community groups advocating the bridging of the Strait. Producing many publications and leading different organizations in petition campaigns, the group was closely linked to the Cape Breton Board of Trade.<sup>24</sup> In *The Permanent Crossing Over the Strait of Canso*, the organization declared that the lack of a permanent link between Cape

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<sup>22</sup> "Suggestions For Strait of Canso Coordinating Group," PANS MG 2, Vol. 981, Folder 3 / 89; Letter from Macdonald to Doucet, April 9, 1948, PANS MG2, Vol. 981, Folder 1 / 2.

<sup>23</sup> *The Permanent Crossing Over the Strait of Canso*, (Sydney: Canso Crossing Association, December 23, 1948), p. 3, PANS MG 2, Vol. 981, Folder 3 / 92.

<sup>24</sup> These petitions campaigns included support groups such as the Glace Bay, New Waterford, Reserve Mines, Dominion, and the Students of St. F.X. to petition the government in support of a link. See PANS MG 2, Vol. 981, Folder 3 / 24; 3 / 26; 3 / 28; 3 / 30; and 3 / 68.

Breton and mainland Nova Scotia forced the Island's citizens "to live within an artificially restricted economy." The lack of connection, moreover, "perpetuates handicaps" already faced by a coal industry competing against other national and international sources of energy.<sup>25</sup>

This local organization played a crucial role in the coming of the Canso project. During and immediately after the war, when the federal government proved to be slow in taking an active role in the link, the Canso Crossing Association sought to give the necessary push for the project. Over the years the Association would produce numerous publications advocating a link across the Strait of Canso, and would work closely with the Premier. For example, after the announcement that a low level bridge be constructed, the Canso Crossing Association decided to send out a press release concerning the decision to the Sydney daily newspaper, the *Post - Record*. Before it was released, however, approval from the Premier was sought concerning the appropriate wording of the statement.<sup>26</sup> Doucet sent the draft of the release entitled *Canso Crossing Diary* to the Premier and asked him for "any expression, alteration, deletion or additions [the

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<sup>25</sup> *The Permanent Crossing Over the Strait of Canso*, p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> For example see correspondence between Doucet and Angus L. Macdonald, Premier of Nova Scotia agreeing to the wording of a press release. The attention the Premier afforded to such groups proved their importance in helping to pressure the Federal government. See letter from Macdonald to L.J. Doucet, March 30, 1949, PANS MG 2, Vol. 982, Folder 1 / 40; letter from Doucet to Macdonald, March 28, 1949, PANS MG 2, Vol. 982, Folder 1 / 41; Press Release; letter from Doucet to Macdonald, April 26, 1949, PANS MG 2, Vol. 982, Folder 1 / 43.

Premier] would care to suggest.”<sup>27</sup> The attention the Premier afforded to such groups proved an important factor in helping to pressure the Federal Government.

It is therefore not surprising that given his prominent role in lobby groups, Doucet wrote the first and only history of the Causeway, *The Road to the Isle : The Canso Causeway - Deepest in the World*.<sup>28</sup> This publication, claiming to be the link’s official history produced two editions: the 25,000 copies of the first edition were distributed during the opening day ceremonies of the Causeway; the second edition was produced for distribution after the opening day ceremonies. This second edition was necessary because there lacked a sufficient number of histories for the 40,000 in attendance at the ceremonies in August. While extensive in its examination of the roles that local organizations, such as the Canso Crossing Association and the Maritime Board of Trade played in the history of the Causeway, it is by no means a scholarly work. Nor is it comprehensive. Focusing almost exclusively on the importance of local groups, and the decision to construct the Causeway, Doucet is inattentive to the political debates and developments of the time. This is largely due to the inaccessibility at the time of important source materials, most particularly, the political papers of Angus L. Macdonald.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Letter from Doucet to Macdonald, April 26, 1949, PANS MG 2, Vol. 982, Folder 1 / 43..

<sup>28</sup> Doucet, *The Road to the Isle*.

<sup>29</sup> It should be noted that Robert Anthony, a student at the University College of

In addition to local lobby groups in Cape Breton, the Transportation Commission of the Maritime Board of Trade (MBT) produced a memorandum in June 1946, favoring the construction of a bridge or causeway across the Strait of Canso. Referring to the witness testimony given by Fairweather and McLachlan during the Special Committee on Reconstruction and Re-Establishment, the memorandum quoted estimate costs and expressed the need for the replacement of the “present car ferry, of the ancillary terminal services and facilities,” whose costs would remain reasonable if kept at the estimated \$12,000,000.<sup>30</sup> It pointed out that the cost of bridging the Strait at \$12,000,000, as estimated by Fairweather, was equal to the maintenance of the present ferry system. The MBT argued that this was reason enough for construction of a permanent link.<sup>31</sup> Although the MBT saw no evidence that the construction of a causeway or bridge would facilitate the revival of the steel and coal industries on the Island, the project was

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Cape Breton attempted a history of the Canso Causeway in March 1976. Entitled *The Road to the Isle : The Canso Causeway - Deepest in the World*, Anthony chronicles the story of the Causeway. Its only bibliographical citation to the *House of Commons Debates*, Anthony’s paper closely parallels that of Doucet’s work and for the same reasons, its analysis falls short. Lacking examination of the political developments, the paper fails to explore important issues behind the developments of the Causeway’s construction. These issues include the debate over what form the permanent link would take (i.e. causeway, tunnel or bridge) and the extensive role Angus L. Macdonald played in exerting pressure on his federal colleagues. “The Road to the Isle : Canso Causeway - Deepest in the World” For History 310, University College of Cape Breton, March 23, 1976, Beaton Institute, Sydney, NS.

<sup>30</sup> “Memorandum in the Matter of the Proposed Bridge or Causeway at the Strait of Canso,” (Transportation Committee of the Maritime Board of Trade, June 5, 1946), pp. 7 - 8, PANS MG 2, Vol. 981, Folder 1 / 13.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

nonetheless important for national defense and for providing employment during the transition from war - time to peace - time activities. The proposal, the Board argued, was a viable reconstruction project that would serve as “a work in the public interest.”<sup>32</sup> This improvement in transportation infrastructure, the memorandum argued, would also serve to increase tourism to the province.

In 1946, the Canso project started to receive national attention. In an article in the magazine *Roads and Bridges*, entitled “Bridge over the Strait of Canso,” Charles P. Disney, former Chief Bridge Building Engineer for Canadian National Railways and an engineer consultant in Toronto, extolled the virtues of bridging the Strait of Canso. Citing the excellent economic opportunities, the project afforded that were both “extensive and widespread” and “by no means confined to Nova Scotia but reach into other parts of Canada,”<sup>33</sup> Disney, who would repeatedly offer his services to help the Canso project, proved eager to spread information about the prospect of the structure. Disney undoubtedly believed that the constant promotion he gave the project would secure his position on the engineering team.

By 1947 the permanent link started to gain broader support. The provincial government organized a delegation of Cape Breton organizations to lobby the federal government in favor of the project. On July 16, 1947 a delegation to Ottawa on behalf of the Canso project, which included Premier Macdonald, William Wilson, Chief Engineer

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

at Dominion Steel, J.E. McCurdy of the Associated Board of Trade, and M.R. Chappell, President of the Associated Board of Trade Strait of Canso Committee, met with Lionel Chevrier, Federal Minister of Transportation, C.D. Howe, Federal Minister of Reconstruction and Supply, and J.L. Ilsely, Minister of Finance and the Regional Minister for Nova Scotia. The wide-ranging discussion touched upon the high level of unemployment in the province, financial estimates for the construction of a causeway with a lock and a bridge, Newfoundland's entry into Confederation and the connection of all of these to making the Causeway a priority.

Unemployment and out-migration were two factors that the lobbyists focused upon in advocating the project. At the time there were an estimated 5,163 unemployed people in Cape Breton, 1,857 in the Pictou area, 3,500 in the Halifax area, and an additional 1,700 had left the province after the war to find work elsewhere. Out-migration has had a huge and enduring impact on the region. Kari Levitt estimated Nova Scotia net migration for the period 1941 - 1951 to be 39,000; between 1951 - 1956, another estimated 11,000; and between 1921 - 1956 there was a net loss of 104,000 people from the region.<sup>34</sup> Levitt found a direct correlation between out-migration and increased economic opportunities in other regions. In the case of Nova Scotia, she found that this loss of population was directly linked to the down-turn in the coal mining

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<sup>33</sup> "Bridge Over the Strait of Canso," *Roads and Bridges*, (October 1946), p. 58.

<sup>34</sup> Kari Levitt, *Population Migration in the Atlantic Provinces*, (Halifax: Atlantic Provinces Research Board, 1960), Table IV, pp. 49, 69, 77.



industry after WWII<sup>35</sup>

A memo from the meeting of July 16 indicated that the federal government initially considered the improvement of the ferries and their terminals to be the only viable option for the Strait. Even though the Committee received no promises that a permanent crossing would be built, the desire to create employment, boost Cape Breton's economy and modernize the region would all work favorably for the crossing's advocates.

However, with new national developments, the Federal Government proved itself open to the possibility of a permanent link. With the possible entry of Newfoundland into Confederation, the Federal Government began to see the Canso project in a more favorable light: it could now be constructed as a national project that would coincide with larger changes in the country.<sup>36</sup> Tourist literature touted the Causeway as the gateway to both Cape Breton Island and "stretching the long arm of unity"<sup>37</sup> to Newfoundland. The physical expansion of the country was a national development that emphasized the need to integrate Newfoundland into the national arena. Therefore the Canso Causeway provided not only a link between Cape Breton and mainland Nova Scotia, but by extension, a link between Newfoundland and the rest of Canada. The incorporation of Newfoundland into Confederation found resonance in what would prove to be a new

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49 and 77.

<sup>36</sup> "Memo of Meeting : Strait of Canso Bridge," PANS MG 2, Vol. 981, Folder 2 / 10.

<sup>37</sup> Doucet, *The Road to the Isle*, n.p. 25.

national transportation system that included the Canso Causeway. Projects like the construction of the TransCanada Highway served to symbolically and practically unite the country. The construction of the Highway and the Causeway symbolized the re-imagination of the state. These national projects ushered in a transitional state system that epitomized the government's new interventionist role in Canadian society.

The day after the July 16 meeting, Clarie Gillis, Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) Member of Parliament for the constituency of Cape Breton South asked the Minister of Transport in the House of Commons about the status of the Canso project. Lionel Chevrier responded that the government was initiating ferry improvements while continuing to consider the possibility of a bridge or a causeway. The Minister assured Gillis that even though the ferry improvements, estimated at \$4,500,000, were proceeding, this would not exclude the possibility of construction of a bridge or a causeway. The Minister stated that the government would consider every possibility, but would be unable to make a decision until the engineers final survey reports and recommendations of the CNR and the Department of Transport were submitted.<sup>38</sup>

Over the years, Gillis became the Cape Breton watchdog for the Canso Project. Elected in 1940, Gillis was the first representative of the CCF ever in Atlantic Canada.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, July 17, 1947, pp. 1 - 3.

<sup>39</sup> The rise of the CCF in Cape Breton in federal and provincial politics signified a new radical development in the country. In 1941, the CCF won 3 of 5 Cape Breton seats

He would hold his seat until 1957. Renowned as the first coal miner ever to serve as Member of Parliament, Gillis's 17 years of parliamentary service would highlight grievances felt in his constituency. Terry Harrop, author of *Clarie : Clarence Gillis, MP, 1940 - 1957* argues that only through Gillis' energetic involvement in pursuing the project, did the Causeway become a reality for the province.<sup>40</sup> This political biography of Gillis narrates his constant support for construction of a permanent link and argues that after the Causeway was completed Gillis' career was essentially over, for he no longer had a cause to fight for.<sup>41</sup>

As the momentum in favor of the Canso project developed, Angus L. Macdonald was constantly receiving proposals from engineers and citizens of Nova Scotia hoping to secure contracts to design, survey or work on the construction teams. One typical letter received by the Premier in hopes of securing construction work came from William Macdonald.<sup>42</sup> Hoping to obtain employment that would allow him to use his new boat,

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in the Nova Scotia House of Assembly.

<sup>40</sup> Gerry Harrop, *Clarie : Clarence Gillis, MP, 1940 - 1957 : A Political Memoir : From the Coal Mines of Cape Breton to the Floors of the House of Commons*, (Hantsport: Lancelot Press, 1987).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, See Chapter 4 "The Post War Parliaments : Causes and a Causeway," pp. 44 - 54.

<sup>42</sup> Letter to Premier Macdonald to William MacDonald, March 15, 1949, PANS MG 2, Vol. 982, Folder 1 / 22. For other examples of persons looking for employment see Alex Locke to Macdonald, March 24, 1949, PANS MG 2, Vol. 982, Folder 1 / 31, looking for a job using his "new diesel shovel"; letter from Malcolm Murdock MacDonald to Macdonald, March 25, 1949, PANS MG 2, Vol. 982, Folder 1 / 36, searching for an "Executive Position"; and Gordon Walker to Macdonald, April 10, 1950,

Macdonald reminded the Premier that he did not “forget the Liberal Party on election day.”

The engineer Charles P. Disney was equally forthright, proposing that he be put in charge of the Canso project. Citing his many engineering accomplishments, his forty years experience and noting that construction of the permanent link would “add considerably to the fame and luster of the Province,” he addressed the benefits that such a project, under his leadership, would give to the province.<sup>43</sup> In his letter, Disney outlined to Macdonald that successful construction of the bridge or causeway was only possible under his direction alone, claiming he possessed “new and patented methods.”<sup>44</sup> This possession of patents for his methods of construction led him to believe that he was the only engineer who understood the complexities of and had the means to construct a link across the Strait. Disney’s innovative methods included the use of Prepakt Concrete, a substance that contains different proportions of cement, sand, stone and water and contains two admixtures not found in ordinary concrete. This unique material, handled only once during production, allegedly, had a 40% less shrinkage than ordinary concrete.<sup>45</sup> Advantages such as these, Disney argued, made his construction and

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PANS MG 2, Vol. 982, Folder 2 / 40, searching for employment with the project as “inspector.”

<sup>43</sup> Letter from C. P. Disney to Macdonald, June 15, 1946, PANS MG 2, Vol. 981, Folder 1 / 14.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Address given by C.P. Disney, April 15, 1947, Sydney, NS 1947, pp. 2, 4, 8 - 10,

engineering methods unique. The engineer claimed that it was only through his methods that the connection between Cape Breton and mainland Nova Scotia was possible.

Disney continued his pursuit of the Canso contract, delivering speeches and publishing magazine articles pertaining to the project. In an address in 1947 to the Associated Board of Trade of Cape Breton and the Cape Breton Branch of Engineering Institution of Canada, he cited advantages in increased communication and transportation activities to and from the Island, higher numbers of tourists and opportunities for industrial development. Proposing a combined railway and highway structure, Disney argued that the Causeway would serve as a section of the TransCanada Highway. This would benefit the province by diverting part of the cost of construction to the Department of Reconstruction and Supply.<sup>46</sup>

Premier Macdonald would also make this case to the Federal Government. In a letter to the Federal Minister of Transport, Macdonald argued that the Canso project had to be included as part of the new TransCanada Highway. It remained the only means of joining the province together, being the only point of access to Cape Breton Island.<sup>47</sup> Ideas of modernization through reconstruction projects such as these were prominent themes throughout the 1940s and 1950s. As David Monaghan has suggested, the Federal Government's motivation for constructing the TransCanada Highway was twofold. He

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PANS MG 2, Vol. 981, Folder 2 / 1.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Letter from Macdonald to Lionel Chevrier, December 23, 1948, PANS MG 2,

states that Ottawa gave funding to the provinces so that

the highway [could] become part of its postwar reconstruction program. The decade saw federal power greatly reinforced by the war emergency, at its apogee, and highways were just one of several provincial spheres where it pondered great involvement.<sup>48</sup>

The project's aim was twofold: to generate employment throughout the country and increase provincial revenue through tourism<sup>49</sup> The Canso project resembled the TransCanada Highway project in its aims. Typifying increased federal involvement after the War, it was designed to create industry and ease the transition to a peace-time economy.

Both the TransCanada Highway and the Canso Causeway served to symbolize Canada's desire to stretch "the long arm of unity" to Newfoundland.<sup>50</sup> They also suggested future developments and modernization. Premier Joseph Smallwood's ambition for Newfoundland was to develop the province's natural resources as quickly and as effectively as possible, epitomized by his slogan "develop or perish." Wanting to exploit Newfoundland's potential to its fullest extent, the Premier saw it as an absolute necessity to encourage industry and to bring the province out of its colonial status. Smallwood wanted the province to participate fully in the Canadian marketplace, rather

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Vol. 981, Folder 3 / 130.

<sup>48</sup> David Monaghan, *Canada's New Mainstreet: The TransCanada Highway as Idea and Reality, 1912 - 1956*, MA Thesis, (Ottawa: University of Ottawa, 1997), p. 32.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>50</sup> Doucet, *The Road to the Isle*, n.p. 25.

then remains an area for the rest of the country's exploitation.<sup>51</sup>

When the joint Canadian National Railways and Department of Transport surveys of the Strait fell behind schedule and remained uncompleted in the spring of 1948, Premier Macdonald and many others in Nova Scotia feared that the project was losing its momentum and that it might not proceed. Five years had passed since the House of Commons Special Committee had convened in 1943, and still no engineering surveys or concrete solutions to the Strait problem had been proposed. In an effort to accelerate consideration for the project, Macdonald proposed that a committee of three neutral members of the public be selected to review the Canso Strait project. He hoped that they would approach the situation "with fresh minds and give a fair and unbiased and new judgment."<sup>52</sup> In two letters to Federal Minister of Transportation, Lionel Chevrier, Macdonald expressed dissatisfaction with D.W. McLachlan, chief of designs and construction at the Federal Department of Transportation, who had whole - heartedly opposed the construction of a bridge in his testimony before the 1943 Special Committee.<sup>53</sup> The Premier later noted discrepancies in McLachlan's cost estimates

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<sup>51</sup> Joseph R. Smallwood, *I Chose Canada : The Memoirs of the Honourable Joseph R. "Joey" Smallwood*, (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1973), pp. 342 - 346 and 352 - 355.

<sup>52</sup> Letter from Macdonald to Chevrier, January 3, 1948, PANS, MG 2, Vol. 981, Folder 3 / 3.

<sup>53</sup> Letters from Macdonald to Chevrier, January 3, 1948, PANS, MG 2, Vol. 981, Folder 3 / 3 and January 12, 1948, Folder 3 / 9.

continued in his 1943 testimony.<sup>54</sup> The Premier even called McLachlan's reputation into question. Without being specific, the Premier told Chevrier "I doubt if Mr. McLachlan commands the whole hearted respect of the engineering profession in this country. In fact, I would go so far as to say that I do not think he does."<sup>55</sup> Macdonald went as far to say that he believed that McLachlan had not "given sufficient thought" to the problem of crossing the Strait of Canso.<sup>56</sup> Both the Premier and Doucet noted McLachlan's discrepancies in cost estimates. In 1943 he estimated the cost of a bridge at \$20,000,000 and a causeway at \$7,900,000; by 1948 that had ballooned to \$54,000,000 and \$35,000,000.<sup>57</sup> Macdonald felt that this huge discrepancy over a five-year period was unreasonable and left most people unsure of what the estimates included. Doucet reiterated these concerns to Chevrier and the Minister, in return, wrote back to Doucet to assure him that both he and the Association would be kept up to date.<sup>58</sup>

Chevrier's support of improvements to the "present facilities" led him to accede

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<sup>54</sup> Letter from Macdonald to Chevrier, January 14, 1948, p. 2. PANS, MG 2, Vol. 981, Folder 3 / 15.

<sup>55</sup> Letter from Macdonald to Chevrier, January 12, 1948, PANS, MG 2, Vol. 981, Folder 3 / 9, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>58</sup> Letter from Doucet to Chevrier, January 14, 1948, PANS, MG 2, Vol. 981, Folder 3 / 15.



to Macdonald's suggestion to appoint a neutral committee on the Canso problem.<sup>59</sup> The result was the establishment of the Strait of Canso Board of Engineers in January 1948. Following Macdonald's suggestion, the Board was made up of three "unbiased" engineers. It was instructed to inquire and report on all possibilities for the crossing of the Strait. Chevrier suggested that the province nominate one representative to the committee, and the Federal Government two representatives, with the province of Nova Scotia covering half of all costs. The official announcement of the appointment of the Committee was made on January 21, 1948. The three appointees were P.L. Pratley of Montreal, the nominee of the Nova Scotia government,<sup>60</sup> and Arthur Surveyor of Montreal and Dean S. Ellis of Kingston, Ontario chosen by the Federal Government.<sup>61</sup>

After months of surveys, the Board of Engineers recommended the construction of a low level bridge. On February 3, 1949, Macdonald proposed to Chevrier that the province of Nova Scotia bear one third the cost of the construction of the link, or the sum of \$5,000,000, depending on which figure was the lesser of the two sums.<sup>62</sup> Chevrier

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<sup>59</sup> Letter from Chevrier to Macdonald, January 8, 1948, PANS MG 2, Vol. 981, Folder 3 / 6.

<sup>60</sup> Telegram from Macdonald to Chevrier, January 30, 1948, PANS MG 2, Vol. 981, Folder 3 / 41.

<sup>61</sup> Telegram from Chevrier to Macdonald, February 5, 1948, PANS MG 2, Vol. 981, Folder 3 / 41.

<sup>62</sup> Letter from Macdonald to Chevrier, February 3, 1949, PANS MG 2, Vol. 982, Folder 1 / 3.

replied a few days later, accepting Nova Scotia's terms.<sup>63</sup> On March 14, 1949, the government announced the proposed construction of a low - level bridge and the cost sharing agreement between Ottawa and the province.

From March 1949 until January 1950 engineers worked diligently to complete the final surveys of the low - level bridge and final plans were completed early in the year. The Board of Engineers submitted the plans to the federal and provincial governments, the Canadian National Railway and the Provincial and Federal Departments of Transport for their approval. Although the plans took almost a full year to complete and had been approved in principle, developments taking place in another national project would have important consequences on the Canso project. In February 1950 Pratley was forced to redesign the plans for the low - level bridge to conform to the dimensions set out by the engineers building the TransCanada Highway. It was necessary to change the width of the road from 22 to 24 feet. The consequent redesigning of the Canso low level bridge further delayed the beginning of the construction process by several months and added an additional \$500,000 to the cost of the project.

By the time the revised set of plans was completed in September 1950, the low level bridge envisioned by the Strait of Canso Board of Engineers suffered a fatal blow. In August 1950, a conference in Montreal attended by representatives of the Nova Scotia government, and representatives of Canadian National Railways, concluded that Pratley's

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<sup>63</sup> Letter from Chevrier to Macdonald, February 8, 1949, PANS MG 2, Vol. 982, Folder 1 / 5.

plans for the low level bridge were unacceptable. The plans were dismissed on the grounds that they were impossible to build. In a letter to Premier Macdonald on September 8, 1950, Chevrier expressed to Premier Macdonald that the plans were “impractical” and that “a low level bridge of the kind and description envisioned by Dr. Pratley, cannot be built.”<sup>64</sup> Ultimately, the extension of the bridge highway from 22 to 24 feet rendered the existing designs unsafe.

In September 1950, M.D. Rawding, the Nova Scotia Minister of Highways and Public Works, confirming the findings of CNR, outlined to Premier Macdonald the province’s reasons for its opposition to Pratley’s plans. The Minister explained that the province’s engineers were “opposed to any low-level bridge ( . . . ) because, in our opinion, it does not constitute a safe and permanent transportation link.” As such they were unable to approve the plans submitted to the province.<sup>65</sup> Rawding further explained that in light of this new development, a causeway should be reconsidered as an alternative means to a bridge across the Strait. In light of these developments and calls for re-examination of the project, with an emphasis on reexamining the possibilities of a causeway, Chevrier called for another meeting with Howe and the engineers for September 15 to discuss the implications of the rejection of Pratley’s low level bridge plans. Chevrier decided to reconvene the Board of Engineers to re - evaluate other

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<sup>64</sup> Letter from Chevrier to MacDonald, September 8, 1950, PANS, MG 2, Vol. 982, Folder 2 / 44.

<sup>65</sup> Letter from Rawding to Macdonald, September 11, 1950, p. 2, PANS, MG 2, Vol.

structure possibilities. This new delay obviously discouraged Macdonald and many citizens of Nova Scotia but plans to find an alternative link were not abandoned. The Board would carry out its agenda in conjunction with engineers from the Nova Scotia Department of Transportation Engineers and the Engineers of the Canadian National Railway, in hopes of preventing further delays of the project.

These sentiments were echoed by Robert Winters, Federal Minister of Resources and Development for Nova Scotia who suggested to Macdonald that the idea of constructing a causeway be re-examined. Arguing that a causeway could be constructed for less the cost of a bridge, Winters stated that the need to push the project ahead as quickly as possible was imperative.<sup>66</sup> Recognizing that the project could conceivably fall through due to constant delays it was facing, Nova Scotian politicians now had to keep a close eye on the project's developments. A letter from Winters to Chevrier, in September 1950, copied to Premier Macdonald echoed this need to follow the project closely. Winters wrote a personal note to the Premier saying "Angus: This is something we will have to try to watch pretty closely from now on or will lose out on [the] project. Bob."<sup>67</sup> Winters went on to warn Chevrier that if neither a bridge nor a causeway could be constructed, that the improvements of the ferry and terminal system be regarded as a "last

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982, Folder 2 / 45.

<sup>66</sup> Letter from Macdonald to Robert Winters, Minister of Resources and Development, September 23, 1950, PANS, MG 2, Vol. 982, Folder 2 / 58.

<sup>67</sup> Letter from Winters to Chevrier, carbon copied to Macdonald, September 19, 1950, PANS, MG 2, Vol., 982, Folder 2 / 59.

resort because any such project would be most unacceptable indeed to the province of Nova Scotia, and especially Cape Breton, who have held such high hopes of getting a more permanent crossing”<sup>68</sup> Thankfully the improvement of the ferry system did not have to be re-examined.

The construction of the Canso Causeway was finally given approval in 1951 in the Board of Engineers’ final report entitled *Report on the Problem of Crossing the Strait of Canso*, prepared for the Federal Department of Transport and the Nova Scotia Department of Highways and Public Works. It concluded that “in view of the elimination of the bridge projects and the high cost of improving ferry services, the causeway scheme remains as the only practical solution to the problem.”<sup>69</sup> The total cost for the construction was estimated at \$22,760,000.

After sending a copy of the Board of Engineers report to Macdonald, Chevrier received a letter from the Premier on August 16 stating that the recommendations were accepted by Nova Scotia and that the province was now willing to pay \$5,500,000 of the total cost of construction.<sup>70</sup> Finally on September 11, 1951, the Federal Cabinet accepted

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<sup>68</sup> Letter from Robert Winters to Chevrier, September 19, 1950, PANS, MG 2, Vol. 982, Folder 2 / 59. p. 1.

<sup>69</sup> *Report on the Problem of Crossing the Strait of Canso*, Prepared for the Federal Department of Transport and the Nova Scotia Department of Highways and Public Works, Strait of Canso Board of Engineers, p. 10, PANS MS 2, Vol. 982, Folder 3 / 90.

<sup>70</sup> Letters from Macdonald to Chevrier that the Nova Scotia government accepted the Board of Engineers recommendation, August 16, 1951, PANS MG 2, Vol. 982, Folder 3 / 54 and proposing the payment by the province, September 5, 1951, PANS MG

the recommendations of the Strait of Canso Board of Engineers and a joint Press release of the Federal and Provincial governments followed on October 9, 1951 announcing the construction of the Canso Causeway.

After years of political wrangling, engineering surveys, and lobbying, the citizens of Nova Scotia realized the dream of bridging the Strait of Canso. The following four years at the Strait would see the employment of thousands of men and over ten million tons of rock dumped into the Strait to produce the one and a half mile long causeway. Although the project never brought the much anticipated revitalization of the coal and steel industries, it helped promote the fast-growing tourism industry on Cape Breton Island. As the opening ceremonies proved, the emphasis on the largely constructed Scottish culture of Cape Breton proved important for the Island's development.

## **Chapter Four: Representations: The Canso Causeway as Cultural Icon**

Ever since the early days of railroading when the old intercolonial was extended into Sydney in the 80s of the last century, some type of permanent crossing across the Strait of Canso has been discussed, planned and advocated. Now, today, it stands majestically before us, a marvel of engineering achievement, a tribute to the men who dreamed of it, the organizations who fostered it, and the governments who built it.

- Donald Gordon, President, Canadian National Railways at the Opening Day Ceremonies of the Canso Causeway, August 13, 1955.<sup>1</sup>

All the many individuals and groups who worked hard to advance this project cannot be recalled by name, but on this day I do wish to pay tribute to a great Canadian, a man who gave unstintingly of his time and energy, so that this development would become a reality. No man worked harder for this unifying link than Angus L. Macdonald. At the ceremonies which initiated work on September 18, 1953, he said 'We wait, of course, the completion of this great endeavor. That will be the day. One hundred pipers will be there, and "The Road to the Isles" will be played.' His wishes and his dreams are today being fulfilled.

-C.D. Howe, Federal Minister of Trade and Commerce at the Opening Day Ceremonies of the Canso Causeway, August 13, 1955.<sup>2</sup>

The opening of the Canso Causeway was a day that the province of Nova Scotia would never forget. The physical joining of Cape Breton Island to mainland Nova Scotia with the completion of the permanent link across the Strait of Canso, completed decades of hard work by Royal Commissions, federal and provincial politicians, local lobby groups, and Premier Angus L. Macdonald. The opening ceremonies on August 13, 1955 high-lighted a spectacular commemorative day, dedicated to the people who turned the "Road to the Isle" into reality. Thousands of Nova Scotians gathered in the Strait area to

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<sup>1</sup> "Thousands Join March Over Causeway," *Halifax Chronicle Herald*, August 15, 1955, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



celebrate the much anticipated physical connection of the Island to the rest of the province. Relying on the highly inefficient ferry service operated by Canadian National Railways for close to eighty years, Cape Bretoners welcomed the Canso Causeway as one of the most unique engineering achievements of its time. Creating a stationary connection between mainland Nova Scotia and Cape Breton Island, the Causeway comprised a swinging lock for vessel passage through the Strait and provided for a means of permanent rail and vehicular transportation across the Strait. Although the ceremonies in August marked the official opening of the Canso Causeway, the permanent connection had been accessible to train passage since April 18, 1955 and to vehicular passage since May 20, 1955.

The Canso Causeway was an impressive sight, an achievement based upon decades of countless inquiries and engineering surveys researching the project. After years of investigation into the Strait project, including discussion of alternative structures such as a bridge, or a tunnel, or even the widely loathed option of improvements to the existing ferry system, the official announcement of the Causeway project was made on October 9, 1951 by Lionel Chevrier, Federal Minister of Transportation. On September 16, 1952, almost a year after the official announcement, construction teams set to work on the project. The first day of construction on the site was celebrated with a small ceremony that included the presence of Angus L. Macdonald, Premier of Nova Scotia, and Lionel Chevrier, both dressed in the appropriate construction attire. Chevrier set off the inaugural dynamite charge that dislodged the first set of granite used as rock - fill in

the Strait and, while riding high in a dump truck, Premier Macdonald received the honor of dumping the first load of granite into the Strait.<sup>3</sup>

Over the next 23 months, 10,092,069 tons of granite were deposited in the Strait of Canso, the fill finally reaching completion on December 31, 1954. The \$23,000,000 project spanned the 3,600 feet of water across the Strait of Canso from Balanche Point to Cape Porcupine, but because of its winding design the Canso Causeway stretched to an actual total length of 4,300 feet. Originally constructed to a width of 130 feet, these dimensions were modified to 80 feet to help improve the Causeway's resistance to inclement weather and tidal conditions. The link descended to a total depth of 217 feet, at a base width of 860 feet, earning it the title of deepest causeway in the world. The swinging lock, allowing for the passage of vessels, measured 3,945 feet in length, including a canal measuring 1,870 feet long and 80 feet wide, occupying 308 feet of the Causeway.<sup>4</sup> The Canso Causeway was an impressive structure, celebrated and praised as an incredible engineering feat. And just as the dimensions and the nature of the Canso Causeway were unique achievements in their own right, so were the opening day ceremonies to celebrate the opening of this structure.

The opening of the Causeway proved an historic and spectacular event for Nova

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<sup>3</sup> "Work on Causeway Started : Transportation Problem Is On Way to Solution : Round the Clock Operation : Completion is Scheduled For Early in 55," *Post Record* September 17, 1952, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Laurence J. Doucet, *The Road to the Isle "The Canso Causeway - Deepest in the World,"* (Fredericton: University of New Brunswick Press, Second Edition, 1955), n.p.

Scotia. The ceremony was epic in proportion, bringing out a provincial record for a public event of 40,000 people in attendance, 15,000 more than anticipated, a record second only to the 1954 85,000 in attendance to see Angus L. Macdonald when he lay in state.<sup>5</sup> The majority of those in attendance were Nova Scotians who traveled from all parts of the province to participate in the ceremonies. Official civic holidays were declared in Sydney, Glace Bay, New Waterford and Mulgrave to allow citizens of the area to make the trip to the Strait to witness the day's ceremonies.<sup>6</sup> Carrying approximately 1,900 people at a special reduced travel rate, Canadian National Railways provided two special service trains, operating from both Halifax and Sydney. Acadian Lines, the regional bus service, also transported free of charge many of the province's citizens from across the province to the Canso area. Although these two carriers no doubt helped to limit some of the anticipated automobile traffic, thousands of vehicles flooded into the area, resulting in the heaviest volume of traffic in provincial history. Traffic tie-ups severely congested both sides of the Strait.<sup>7</sup> After public parking spaces designated for personal vehicles in Port Hastings and Auld's Cove quickly filled up, many drivers

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<sup>5</sup> "Largest Crowd in Nova Scotia History Gathers for Official Ceremonies," *Post Record*, August 15, 1955, p. 1 and "Triumphal Achievement Another Important Chapter Written in Canadian History," *Post Record* August 15, 1955, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> "Civic Holiday Planned For Causeway Opening," *The Guysboro County Advocate and Canso Breeze*, August 12, 1955, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> "Largest Crowd in Nova Scotia History Gathers for Official Ceremonies," *Post Record*, p. 1

obtained permission to park in private fields offered by obliging property owners in the area. People arrived the night before the ceremonies to capture prime seating to witness the event.<sup>8</sup> At the ceremonies, spectators were given an official *Souvenir Program*, containing an order of the day's events, and *The Road to the Isle : the Canso Causeway - Deepest in the World*, the official history of the Canso Causeway had been written by prominent local businessman L.J. Doucet, an active lobbyist for a permanent link.

Commencing at 2 p.m., the ceremony itself lasted thirty minutes. It featured addresses by various individuals connected with the project, the cutting of the ribbon to officially open the Causeway, a salute by the Royal Canadian Navy and Air Force, and then concluded with the "March of the Hundred Pipers." George Marler, Federal Minister of Transport gave the introductory remarks and served as master of ceremonies for the occasion. The Minister noted that the completion of the Canso Causeway marked years of hard work by lobbyists, politicians, engineers and workers on the construction teams and that without their dedication and cooperation, the project would never have been completed.<sup>9</sup> Marler's opening remarks were followed by the invocation extended by Venerable Arnold, Archdeacon of Cape Breton, and the Gaelic greeting offered up by the Reverend Stanley P. Macdonald, brother of Angus L. Macdonald.

The keynote addresses of the ceremony were delivered by Henry Hicks, Premier

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<sup>8</sup> " 'Road to the Isle' Invasion Underway For Opening Today," *Halifax Chronicle Herald*, August 13, 1955, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> "Thousands Join in March Over Causeway," p. 2.

of Nova Scotia, Donald Gordon, the President of Canadian National Railways, and Mrs. Agnes Macdonald, wife of the late Angus L. Macdonald. All three speakers, in the spirit of the day, acknowledged the significant contributions to the new permanent interface made by those involved in every aspect of the Canso Causeway. No-one received nor deserved greater recognition for his efforts than "Angus L." One of the strongest proponents of the permanent crossing over the Strait of Canso, Macdonald's ultimate dream for the Causeway was to celebrate the opening of the interface with the "March of One Hundred Pipers," a group of kilted bagpipers, piping across the link to Cape Breton.

"Angus L.," as he was commonly known, was perhaps the most beloved politician Nova Scotia ever produced. Born in Dunvegan, Cape Breton in 1890, Macdonald fashioned a distinguished academic and political career. He also pursued an impressive military career, serving in the First World War in the 185th Cape Breton Highlanders and eventually attaining the rank of captain. After receiving a law degree from Dalhousie University in 1921, Macdonald became a part time lecturer at his alma mater and eventually made his way to Harvard Law School to pursue post - graduate work. In 1929, he returned to Nova Scotia and a life in politics. After being elected leader of the Nova Scotia Liberal Party in 1930, Macdonald entered the Nova Scotia House of Assembly in 1933. He served as Premier of the province from 1933 until his resignation in 1940 in order to enter Prime Minister Mackenzie King's cabinet. During the war he served as Minister of National Defense for Naval Services. By the time he left for Ottawa to serve

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as MP for Kingston, Macdonald was the undisputed champion of Nova Scotia politics. Brian Boudreau argues “when Macdonald left to serve in Ottawa in 1940 he was at the height of his popularity. He had become “political master” of the province, one who could win elections on image alone.”<sup>10</sup>

However, Macdonald’s sojourn in Ottawa did not prove as successful as his reign in Nova Scotia. Boudreau points to deep divisions between Macdonald and Mackenzie King while in Ottawa. This included, for example, Macdonald’s (along with fellow Nova Scotians J.L. Ralston and J.L. Ilsley’s) ongoing support for conscription, while King had formidably avoided the subject for several years.<sup>11</sup>

At the end of WWII, after having served five years in federal politics as the Member of Parliament for Kingston, Macdonald resigned his post in Ottawa. Returning to Halifax, Macdonald once again became Premier of Nova Scotia and served the province in this capacity until his sudden, premature death in office on April 13, 1954 at the age of 63.<sup>12</sup> It is interesting to note that Macdonald’s tenure in Nova Scotia politics from 1945 until his death was nowhere as strong as in pre - war years; paradoxically

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<sup>10</sup> Brian Boudreau, *Restoration and Reaction : Angus L. Macdonald’s post - war tenure, 1945 - 1949*, Honours Thesis, (Halifax: Dalhousie University, 1997), p. 25.

<sup>11</sup> Boudreau, pp. 32 - 35. The conscription crisis has been well documented by T. Stephen Henderson, “Angus L. Macdonald and the Conscription Crisis of 1949,” *Acadiensis*, Vol. XXVII, No. 1, (Autumn 1997), pp. 85 - 104.

<sup>12</sup> John Hawkins, *The Life and Times of Angus L.*, (Windsor: Lancelot Press Limited, 1969) and *The Speeches of Angus L. Macdonald*, (Toronto: Longmans, Green and Company, 1960), pp. xv - xxi.

“[t]he quality of his leadership diminished as the hold he had over Nova Scotia grew.”<sup>13</sup>

During his time in Nova Scotia, Macdonald actively pursued the Strait of Canso project as his top priority, echoing the House of Commons Committee on Reconstruction and Re-establishment which saw the Causeway as an important reconstruction project.<sup>14</sup> Macdonald became the spokesperson for the project, making it his own personal dream to see Cape Breton physically connected to mainland Nova Scotia. The Premier acted as liaison between federal and provincial governments and lobby groups from Cape Breton in pursuit of the permanent link. Known as the champion for the Causeway,<sup>15</sup> Angus L.’s unstinting intense work on behalf of the Canso project led some to suggest naming the Canso project the Angus L. Macdonald Causeway. Although the project failed to carry the late Premier’s name, the opening ceremonies highlighted his never - ending support and contribution to the project. The speeches at the ceremonies all paid tribute to the legacy of Macdonald and the contribution he made to the success of the Canso project.

Donald Gordon, President of CNR, noted that the opening of the Causeway “is the moment that properly belongs to him - the great task done that commanded so much of

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<sup>13</sup> Boudreau, p. 27.

<sup>14</sup> *House of Commons Special Committee on Reconstruction and Re-Establishment*, “Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence,” No. 15, Friday May 21, 1943.

<sup>15</sup> One organization that had massive influence and kept in constant contact with the Premier in regards to direction of lobbying was the Canso Crossing Association, an initiative of the Cape Breton Board of Trade founded in 1947, but existing as a separate entity. (See “How We Got the Canso Causeway,” *Cape Breton Magazine*, ed. Ron Caplan, No. 25 (June 1979), p.42.

his attention and his talents.”<sup>16</sup> Yet, the most stirring address was that of Agnes Macdonald, widow of the late Premier. In her speech she noted the significant role her late husband played in lobbying for the project. “For let it be remembered, and let it never be forgotten,” she remarked, “that without his dream and his determination, there would not be a ‘Road To The Isles’ for us to officially open here today”<sup>17</sup> C.D. Howe, Federal Minister of Trade and Commerce who, in his capacity as Federal Minister of Transport, officially announced the construction of the Canso Causeway on October 9, 1951, also paid tribute to the late Premier. He characterized Macdonald as someone who “gave unstintingly of his time and energy, so that this development would become a reality. No man worked harder for this unifying link than Angus L. Macdonald.”<sup>18</sup> Howe had played an important role in the negotiations between the federal and provincial governments and worked closely with Macdonald to see the project through to its completion.

Following Howe’s address, the Reverend John R. Macdonald, Bishop of Antigonish extended hope that the Causeway would promote a new sense of unity throughout Canada and demonstrate the solidarity and strength among Nova Scotians. The Bishop expressed the wish that the Causeway, would succeed in bringing an increased sense of unity in Nova Scotia and that “material progress” would be one of the

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<sup>16</sup> “Thousands Join in March Over Causeway,” p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.



positive results of the Causeway.<sup>19</sup> At exactly 2:25 p.m., following Bishop Macdonald's message, C.D. Howe cut the tartan ribbon, to officially open the Canso Causeway. The momentous occasion was followed by the dream that Angus L. Macdonald had for the opening of the Causeway: the "March of a Hundred Pipers." In an elaborate and ornate demonstration, one hundred bagpipers marched across the link, piping the tune, "The Road to the Isle," with an additional three hundred pipers following the procession. Following this lavish display to close the ceremonies at the Strait, the day continued with an exhibition of the Highland Games in Antigonish until 5 p.m..

Although the opening day ceremonies were a celebratory event to open the Causeway, a closer examination reveals much about the culture of Nova Scotia, and Cape Breton Island in particular. One can read the ceremonies as a text, in which certain ideas and perceptions about the province were reflected and perpetuated. The commemoration of opening day in local daily newspapers, periodicals, souvenir programs and tourist literature, reinforced certain perceptions about Cape Breton's culture and Scottish identity.

The images, actions and speeches of the day were intent upon presenting Cape Breton as a traditional Scottish society, and the Causeway as a modern gateway to visiting the Island's old world. In the speeches and actions of those in attendance, and the literature of the ceremonies, Cape Breton was rendered as a Scottish society deeply

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> "Largest Crowd In Nova Scotia History Gathers For Official Ceremonies," p. 1.

rooted in a traditional way of life, a notion to be accepted both by those inside and outside the province. This portrayal of Nova Scotia as a Scottish haven overshadowed discussion of the potential industrial growth that the structure provided and the new ease of movement it provided to and from the Island. The Causeway altered access to and from the Island. It opened up the Island to the rest of the world and was used to help promote the tourist industry, being an attraction itself. The tourist industry had been on the rise in the province since the early 1930s, and continues to play a dominant role in the direction of Nova Scotia economic development. The modern structure, a feat of engineering technology would hopefully lead to the modernization of Cape Breton. However, the Causeway instead became a cultural icon. The link embodied both the erroneous perception of Cape Breton being a traditional Scottish society<sup>20</sup> while simultaneously coexisting with the view that the Causeway would help launch Cape Breton into the twentieth century, bringing new technologies and developments to the Island, in order to improve and strengthen its industries. These two ideas come together to present an unusual, paradoxical mix of modern and antimodern ideas, symbolized by the Causeway. The opening day ceremony, its symbolism, including discourses about accessibility and modernity, however paradoxical, conformed to contemporary discourses concerning the social, cultural and economic experience of Nova Scotia.

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<sup>20</sup> For discussion of the perceived "Scottishness" of the province and the impact of Angus L. Macdonald on this portrayal see Ian McKay "Tartanism Triumphant : The Construction of Scottishness in Nova Scotia, 1933 - 1954," *Acadiensis*, Vol. XXI, No. 2 (Spring 1993), pp. 5 - 47.

As a manifestation of modernity, the technology used to construct the Canso Causeway was the first of its kind. This use of technology shaped the idea that Cape Breton was now being thrown into the twentieth century. Part of the discourse of the opening day ceremonies presented this new and improved route to and from the Island as a means to revive the suffering coal and steel industries which could now theoretically compete with the markets in the rest of the country. As a modern, technological wonder, the Canso Causeway would help facilitate the revival of the Cape Breton economy bringing the Island into the twentieth century. Federal Transport Minister George Marler recognized the modern engineering feat of the Causeway. In his introductory remarks he noted that “(t)hese improved transportation facilities afforded by the Causeway (would lead to) the establishment of new industries.”<sup>21</sup> However, while these comments reflect the initial result strived for (revival of the coal and steel industries) they were lost in the mythical portrayal of Scottish ideals rampant throughout Nova Scotia at the time.

As discussed extensively by Ian McKay, Scottish ideals and perceptions about Nova Scotian society were well entrenched in the psyche of the province.<sup>22</sup> In his groundbreaking study, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in*

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<sup>21</sup> “Largest Crowd in NS History Gathers for Official Ceremonies,” p. 13.

<sup>22</sup> Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk : Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill - Queen’s University Press, 1994); McKay, “Tartanism Triumphant : The Construction of Scottishness in Nova Scotia, 1933 - 1945,” *Acadiensis*, Vol. XXI, No. 2, (Spring 1992); and McKay, “History and the Tourist Gaze : Politics and Commemoration in Nova Scotia, 1935 - 1964,” *Acadiensis*, Vol. XXII, No. 2, (Spring 1993).

*Twentieth Century Nova Scotia*, McKay argues that cultural producers of Nova Scotia, such as folklorist Helen Creighton and handcraft revivalist Mary Black, helped create and market the cultural and social idea of the Nova Scotia “Folk.” The Folk, as defined by McKay, is the concept that certain people of Nova Scotia, such as the fisherfolk, were the carriers of tradition and folklore. This concept of the people being insiders of a different, almost inaccessible cultural world created the idea that these people belonged to a culture and society different from their own. He argues that this concept of another time and place could be and was sold for the sake of the tourist industry.<sup>23</sup> The emergence of this antimodern idea that helped produce the concept of the Folk was taken up by “middle class cultural producers” and “had to be created through framing and distilling procedures carried out in thought, and then set into practice through processes of selection and invention”<sup>24</sup> McKay argues that the emergence of the Folk resulted in the state taking an active role in tourism and its production of their images that centered around the idea of selling, marketing, but most importantly, *producing* the image of the Folk.<sup>25</sup> This idea is important for the present study because McKay’s work traces the roots of tourism and state control over image production for the industry. This state control, under Angus L. Macdonald took the form of perpetuating the “Scottish” myth. This was the idea that Nova Scotia was the New World’s Scotland.

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<sup>23</sup> McKay, *The Quest of the Folk*, pp. 28 - 36.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8 and 29.

In constructing the idea of the Folk, Nova Scotia became the embodiment of an exploitative tourist industry that promoted a historically inaccurate portrayal of its people. In "Tartanism Triumphant," McKay successfully argues that the image of Nova Scotia being of predominantly Scottish background is historically inaccurate and fails to take into account the contribution of other founding ethnic groups such as Acadian, English, Irish and Native.<sup>26</sup> The role the state played in the intervention and direction of tourist related activities, McKay states, was one of the main reasons why the prevalence of the Scottish idea took on such a predominant role within the province. With Premier Angus L. Macdonald (once described as a "Scotophile"<sup>27</sup>) at the helm of provincial politics, the idea of Nova Scotia as a traditional Scottish haven was promoted as the dominant identity and cultural inspiration of the province.<sup>28</sup> McKay argues that when Angus L. became Premier, "(t)artanism (...) did not spring forth, fully kilted, from the forehead (of Angus L.) after his election in 1933." He argues that the rise of tartanism was a gradual process, but that, without the premier, it might not have become such a powerful force of cultural expression in the province.<sup>29</sup> As McKay suggests, the opening of the Causeway was the

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34. Author's italics.

<sup>26</sup> McKay, "Tartanism Triumphant," pp. 6 - 8.

<sup>27</sup> Marjory Harper and Michael E. Vance, eds., *Myth, Migration, and the Making of Memory : Scotia and Nova Scotia, c. 1700 - 1990*, (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1999), p. 32.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

epitome of Macdonald's quest to "tartanize" the province.<sup>30</sup>

McKay's work on the Folk and tourism in Nova Scotia focuses on the province's development of the tourist industry during the 1920s and the 1930s, and Angus L. Macdonald's time as Premier of the province. McKay's article "History and the Tourist Gaze," extends beyond Macdonald's time frame, examining the years 1935 - 1964. His analysis of the years after the death of the Premier focus on the "mnemonic web of mansions and museums, plaques and forts, road signs and historical romances" that focused on the romanticism of the time and a need to preserve the past as a "sort of innocence" in order to serve the tourists.<sup>31</sup> Once again McKay addresses the romantic idea of Nova Scotia being a place of "otherness" to attract the tourist dollar.

Such perceptions of "otherness" and "Scottishness" dominated the Causeway's opening day ceremonies. Upon arrival attendees of the ceremonies were presented with *The Road To The Isle - The Canso Causeway - Deepest in the World* and the *Official Souvenir Program*.<sup>32</sup> Both publications serve to demonstrate the Scottish theme of the day. One can clearly identify the modernist - antimodernist paradox in Laurence J. Doucet's *Road to the Isle*. Doucet attempted to trace the history of the Canso Causeway. This history included details of attempts to cross the Strait through different means and

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47. It should be noted that these claims have been attacked, most notable by Brian Boudreau and Adrian Willischer, see discussion in Chapter One.

<sup>31</sup> Ian McKay, "History and the Tourist Gaze," pp. 104 and 113.

<sup>32</sup> Doucet, *The Road to the Isle* and *Official Souvenir Program*, (Nova Scotia

also discussed the extensive role played by lobby groups. Although the history addressed the rise of industry, it also extolled the virtues of Cape Breton as a Scottish land with its “quaint villages resplendent with Scottish customs.”<sup>33</sup> The cover of the publication featured a tartan background. Careful planning was taken in choosing the title for the official commemorative history of the Island. Derived from the traditional Scottish bagpipe ballad, “Road to the Isles” (the tune the 100 pipers played during their march across the Causeway), the title was altered slightly to “Road to the Isle,” to distinguish the history of the link and its connection to Cape Breton Island. The *Road to the Isle* proved to be an important component of the history of the Canso Causeway:

(...) the title was chosen and copyrighted because the Canso Causeway literally, technically, theoretically, and traditionally links the one and only [uniqueness and otherness] Cape Breton Island with the mainland of Nova Scotia.<sup>34</sup>

That the government sought copyright for the title demonstrates the importance it placed upon connection and preservation of Scottish ideals in Nova Scotia. This was not a new idea. Previously, the province of Nova Scotia had copyrighted a design for a Nova Scotia tartan, which had no real origins in Scotland, but simply asserted Nova Scotia’s Scottish identity.<sup>35</sup> The *Official Souvenir Program* also helped to buttress the notion

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Industrial and Tourist Promotion).

<sup>33</sup> Doucet, n.p. 45.

<sup>34</sup> “Road to the Isle - Story of a Community,” *Halifax Chronicle Herald*, August 13, 1955, p. 13.

<sup>35</sup> Marjorie Major, “History of the Nova Scotia Tartan,” *Nova Scotia Historical*

that Cape Breton was deeply rooted in the traditions of a Celtic society. The program's cover featured "authentic Celtic art" designed specifically for the opening, including decorative designs of the thistle, one of the symbols of Scotland decoratively placed around an "ancient form of Celtic Lettering."<sup>36</sup> Although the cover's inspiration derived from traditional Greek lettering and the Irish Book of Kells, there was no mistaking the dominant Scottish influence. The photograph inside the program featured a male bagpipe player and two girls, all kilted in appropriate Scottish attire, with the Canso Causeway pictured in the background. Undoubtedly used to inspire a Scottish loyalty, this same picture was widely published at the time of the opening, appearing in both the *Post Record* and the *Halifax Chronicle Herald*. The picture was placed as an advertisement by the province of Nova Scotia, congratulating the people on the opening of the link, and asserting the unity of the province "in name, spirit, and ideals."<sup>37</sup>

The speeches made during the ceremony also paid homage to a Scottish society. Donald Gordon, President of Canadian National Railways, delivered one of the key addresses during the ceremonies. Though the CNR played the major role in the designing, engineering and construction of the modern Causeway, including the diversion of railway lines for more than twenty miles, Gordon's speech was first and foremost a

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*Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 2, (June 1972), pp. 191 - 214.

<sup>36</sup> *Canso Causeway Opening : Air Lorg Nan Eilean*, (August 13, 1955) PANS V/F vol 56, no. 5.

<sup>37</sup> *Post Record*, August 10, 1955, p. 32.; and *Halifax Chronicle Herald*, August 13, 1955, p. 9.



tribute to both the people of Cape Breton and Angus L. Macdonald. He spoke of his pleasure in being “among other clansmen” for the opening ceremonies.<sup>38</sup> In his address Gordon stated

Here, too, is a colorful setting dear to the Highland heart - the gathering of the clans, the flash of the tartan, the hundred pipers marshaled for the historic march, the haunting melody of the pipers, the magic sounds of the ancient and honorable tongue and the quiet beauty of the heather - clad hills of Cape Breton in the background.<sup>39</sup>

A special presentation made during the ceremony underscored Gordon's notion that he was among his clansmen. Presented with a cromak, a traditional Scottish walking stick adorned with the Nova Scotian tartan, Gordon used it to walk across the Causeway with an official party that included Agnes Macdonald, Lieutenant Governor Alister Fraser, and C.D. Howe.<sup>40</sup> The gesture implied his stepping through to the old world, Cape Breton, that was filled with tradition. And it is through this action that the modern / antimodern paradox clearly emerges. Although stepping into an old world, the party was only able to do so by means of the modern engineering feat.

The spirit and memory of perhaps the most beloved Scot in the province, Angus L. Macdonald, was eulogized by each guest speaker at the ceremony. Remembering the life and times of the Premier, many took the time to emphasize that the Causeway would

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> “Thousands Join in March Over Causeway,” p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7 and “Largest Crowd in NS History Gathers for Official Ceremonies,” p. 1.

not and could not have been built without his dedication and perseverance. Agnes Macdonald told the crowd that the Causeway was the dream of her husband, and how the great achievement would never have been possible without him. Taking time to praise the achievements of the people of Nova Scotia, Agnes Macdonald had this to say:

The Scot has ever a wandering feet and for years, and many years, the Cape Bretoners have been carrying their brains, their courage, their high ideals, and their great hearts to the four corners of the earth and wherever they have gone, those places have been better for their coming. But no matter where they may be, or how far away they may go, their loyalty, their love for this isle and their thoughts fly homeward over a causeway known only to the heart.<sup>41</sup>

Even the simple action of the official cutting of the ribbon on the Causeway by Defence Production Minister C.D. Howe was rooted in Scottish symbolism. The ribbon, a Nova Scotian tartan, was cut “with an ancient claymore said to have been used by a supporter of Bonnie Prince Charlie at the Battle of Culloden in 1746.”<sup>42</sup> After the opening ceremony, the sword was then used by Mrs. Macdonald to cut the cake at the reception for the official party.

Publications reporting on the ceremonies also noted the Scottishness of the day.

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<sup>41</sup> “Thousands Join In March Over Causeway,” p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7. For the history of the Nova Scotian tartan see Marjorie Major “The Story of the Nova Scotian Tartan.” After designing a special panel for the Nova Scotia Sheep Breeders Association, Bessie Bailey Murray’s customized kilt for the sheep herder depicted in the design garnered much attention at the exhibit. After the pattern was brought to the attention of Angus L. Macdonald, the Premier applied to Lord Lyon of England and was successful in obtaining rights to have the design for the province of Nova Scotia. On April 26, 1954 the tartan was copyrighted to the province and officially became part of the province’s heraldry by Order-In-Council in April 1963.

*Canadian National Magazine*, the official publication of the Canadian National Railways, featured a special report on the opening ceremonies of the Canso Causeway. While the magazine discussed the technological advances made possible by the new link, the mixing of the modern and antimodern are evident. Despite its discussion of “the progress it (the Canso Causeway) will surely bring,” the descriptions of modernism became lost in the colorful discussion of the “clansmen” who gathered for the ceremonies.<sup>43</sup> The author of the article, F.R. Sayer likened the ceremonies to a “mammoth gathering of the clans.”<sup>44</sup> This idea of a traditional Scottish “gathering of the clans” was also noted in the *Post - Record*. The newspaper’s description of the ceremonies highlighted the Scottishness of the day, presenting images that only a gathering of the clans could conjure up.

The clans of Highland Cape Breton Island and the rest of Nova Scotia were well represented at the huge gathering. The proud display of colorful clan plaids and tartans tangibly attested to the Highland pride of participating in this most epochal event in Nova Scotia history.<sup>45</sup>

The opening day of the Canso Causeway found itself immortalized in locally written and published pieces. The poem “Angus L.” written by H.M. Logan eulogized

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<sup>43</sup> F.R. Sayer, “Colorful Ceremonies Mark Causeway Opening,” *Canadian National Magazine*, Vol. 41, No. 8. (September 1955), p. 7

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> “40,000 Salute Causeway : Clans Represented,” *Post Record*, August 15, 1955, p.7.

the former Premier and his contribution to the project.<sup>46</sup> The “Causeway Song,” as Charlotte MacInnes reported, was “sung at a Scottish concert in our parish hall shortly after the opening of the Causeway.”<sup>47</sup> But probably the most widely known and publicized piece of work was the poem “The Bochdan Bridge of Canso.”<sup>48</sup> Written by Dan Lewis Macdonald, brother of Angus L. the poem became a cultural expression in the history of the link. It appeared in the publication of the *Scotian Sun* on the 25th anniversary of the opening day of the Causeway on August 1980.<sup>49</sup>

If the opening ceremonies involved an orgy of tartanism, accessibility was also closely involved in the paradox of modernism. Howe’s inaugural speech emphasized the new tourist opportunities that would now be available to both Canadians and Americans. The Causeway helped remarkably to make Cape Breton Island more accessible to the public. Describing the Island as a “vacation wonderland,” the Minister stated that the Causeway meant a new era for tourism in the province. Not only did the Causeway serve to lead tourists to sites on the island, but it would in fact be a modern attraction unto itself. This was also noted in the publication of *Teamwork*, which described the project

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<sup>46</sup> “Angus L.” H.M. Logan from the Elizabeth MacEachern Collection, Beaton Institute, MG 12, 103.2 (c).

<sup>47</sup> “The Causeway Song,” Charlotte MacInnes, Creignish, from the Elizabeth MacEachern Collection, Beaton Institute, MG 12, 103.2 (c).

<sup>48</sup> “The Bochdan Bridge of Canso,” Dan Lewis MacDonald, from the Dan Lewis MacDonald Collection, Beaton Institute, MG 15, 35.

<sup>49</sup> “The Bochan Bridge of Canso,” *Scotia Sun*, 25th Aniversary Edition Supplement,

as a modern engineering feat and an attraction to tourists.

(...)its promise as an engineering achievement, the fact it is the deepest in the world and the commodity it affords, the Canso Causeway has become one of the most exciting tourist attractions in this part of the country.<sup>50</sup>

As part of the TransCanada Highway, the Canso Causeway played a major role in its promotion. This achievement was noted for attracting tourists and making the country more accessible. Accessibility and the development of a modern transportation infrastructure both helped to form the contemporary Canadian state's economy.

After the opening of the Causeway there was a plethora of tourist literature featuring the link both as a project that facilitated tourism into the area, and as an attraction in and of itself. Travel literature that promoted travel to Cape Breton after the opening of the Causeway promoted the Island's modernity and its new accessibility. Publications such as *Oval*, *Travel* and the *Canadian National Magazine* all helped to promote Cape Breton to tourists and encourage travel through the region. The article "Colorful Ceremonies Mark Causeway Opening" helped to promote the unity and excitement behind the Causeway and the advantages it would bring to the Island.<sup>51</sup> Describing the celebrations of the day, the magazines pointed to an "atmosphere charged with nostalgia" where "the crowds of proud Nova Scotians" gathered to celebrate the

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August 13, 1980.

<sup>50</sup> "Canso Causeway - Deepest in the World : A Triumph for Human Cooperation," *Teamwork*, Vol. 11, No. 123, August 1955.

<sup>51</sup> Sayer, pp. 6 - 7.

permanent link over the Strait of Canso.<sup>52</sup>

In a statement congratulating the province on the opening of the Canso Causeway, George Drew, leader of the National Progressive Conservative Party in Canada, spoke of the accessibility of the Island to tourists from around the world. Drew stated that the Causeway would now be a point of access to the scenic Island for a society for visitors “who will be impressed to observe how carefully the customs and traditions of the Island have been preserved over the years.”<sup>53</sup> The Minister also addressed the economic benefits the improved transportation link would provide for Cape Breton, noting that “governments have not been unmindful of the need of better and more reliable transportation to and from Cape Breton Island.”<sup>54</sup>

C.D. Howe, before the cutting of the ribbon on the Causeway, spoke in admiration of the dedication of the engineers and workers who helped to complete “one of the great engineering undertakings of this country.”<sup>55</sup> Howe’s inaugural speech highlighted the economic possibilities for the Island as a result of the new Causeway. Speaking of the potential economic benefit for the coal and steel industries, Howe spoke of the improved transportation that these industries now had at their disposal. Improved accessibility, Howe stated, would help those families who “depend for their livelihood upon the heavy

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>53</sup> *Post Record*, August 10, 1955, p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> “Thousands Join in March Over Causeway,” p. 2.

industry of Nova Scotia” and were now able to “participate much more effectively in the growing opportunities offered by our expanding national economy.”<sup>56</sup> Improved access, the promotion of industry and modernization of the region, Howe believed, would help to bolster the national economy and to attract new industries to the Island. While coal and steel never regained the prosperity they had once enjoyed, Stora forest industries would eventually establish themselves on the Island.

The presence of Howe at the ceremonies is itself ironic. As the Minister of Munitions and Supply during WWII, Howe’s war - time development in Canada focused on the industrial development in the provinces of Ontario and Quebec. Personifying the economic development in Central Canada during the war, it is therefore ironic that Howe, ten years later, would be the “claymore - wielding”<sup>57</sup> politician identified with Maritime development, by officially opening the Causeway, epitomizing economic development in the Maritime region.

The idea of modernizing the Island and integrating it into the rest of North American society was evident in other tourist pamphlets produced. Making Cape Breton accessible was equated with the modernization of the region, bringing it out of both its isolation and its perceived traditional ways. A tourism pamphlet entitled “Nova Scotia Camera Tour” stated that “gone with the March of the Hundred Pipers on opening day,

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

was the old - time isolation of the Celtic Isle.”<sup>58</sup> Statements such as these identify the Causeway with improved notions of accessibility and the promotion of tourism.

A tourism pamphlet produced by Tauck Tours promoting a package bus travel tour entitled “Cape Breton Island / Cabot Trail” extolled the virtues of the Island’s new facilities and the province’s attempts to improve its tourism industry. Claiming that the Island had once been “for all practical purposes inaccessible,” the pamphlet features the Causeway as one of the modern improvements made to the Island. Combining the “modern highways” and “deluxe hotels and modern facilities” that have since replaced the “old roads” with the images of a region that “reminds one of Old Scotland” helped to promote the traditional society sought by visitors, while promising modern accommodations. Accessibility and modernization were combined with a push for community tourism and culturally, this change in industry helped communities to look at improvements of their own area.

However, promotion of the Canso Causeway and Cape Breton was not solely confined to published literature. In Ardian Willsher’s study of promotional films of the Nova Scotia Film Board, 1945 - 1970, he identifies two films, 1956’s *Road to Keltic* and 1955’s *Identity* which feature the Causeway. He concludes that the Causeway was presented in such a way as to leave the impression that the structure was put in place solely to serve the tourists. He concludes

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<sup>58</sup> *Nova Scotia Camera Tour*, Nova Scotia Department of Trade and Industry, Halifax, NS, 195(?), PANS F91 N85 N85.



the film portrays the Canso Causeway in a way that suggests that the structure serves primarily a tourist function (...) Certainly the Causeway allows easier access to the mainland, but in the context of the film, with its emphasis on the attractions awaiting North American visitors on the other side of the Strait of Canso, the Causeway appears to be constructed for the tourist's benefit.<sup>59</sup>

An article entitled "Late Angus L. Described "Skipper, True Gael," reprinted here from the *Halifax Chronicle Herald* sums up the ambiance surrounding the opening day ceremonies. Summarizing the ceremonies, it spoke of progress, modernity, accessibility, the memory of the Premier and the Scottish ideals associated with Cape Breton. The ideas of Cape Breton as a traditional Scottish land dominated the piece.

We have heard the shrill, inciting tones of the Hundred Pipers playing "The Road to the Isles," the tramp of marching feet has faded but "quiet blue eyes in the Dun are weeping" because a hero in the ranks of Clan Ranald was missing today, the "Skipper" and true Gael, the late Angus L. Macdonald. How handsome is the Causeway as it challenges the turbulent challenges of the Strait? How convenient is man's inventiveness? A sturdy, smooth - surfaced road now links the mainland of Nova Scotia to Cape Breton. According to some, this is present day progress. We hope that as a result of this progress we shall never forget the heritage and independent spirit of our valiant progenitors who sailed away from coasts of Scotland to voyage over the dark - blue waves of the deep in search of the promised land.<sup>60</sup>

Thus, an examination of the opening day ceremonies of the Canso Causeway reveals much about Cape Breton society. The social and cultural evolution of the Island as an expression of Scottishness culminated in the ceremonies in August 1955. While the Causeway was a modern technological achievement which possessed the potential to

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<sup>59</sup> Adrian Willsher, pp. 97 - 98.

<sup>60</sup> "Late Angus L. Described "Skipper, True Gael," " *Halifax Chronicle Herald*,

attract new industries to the area it was the imagery of tartanism that dominated the contemporary discourse. However, while the completion of the Canso Causeway was a massive achievement in and of itself, not all the changes it brought were welcome.

## **Chapter Five: Results: The Canso Causeway's Enduring Impact**

Things never turn out the way they're meant.<sup>1</sup>

Projects such as the Canso Causeway, the permanent link connecting mainland Nova Scotia and Cape Breton Island, served to create employment for the economically struggling province in the post Second World War era. Its opening on August 13, 1955 marked the culmination of the most ambitious undertakings the Nova Scotia government had undertaken for reconstruction after the war. This project was viewed by many as the means to both economic development for the province and recovery for Cape Breton's coal and steel industries.

However, the Causeway's completion proved to be a double-edged sword. The period immediately prior to and following the opening of the permanent link saw the economic and social dislocation of the Strait area. This included a flurry of out migration of those persons left unemployed as a result of the closing of the ferry system and the railway terminal. Eventually, however, this closure prompted the Strait region's successful enticement of Stora Kopparberg, the international pulp and paper company, to set up in the area. As for the rest of Cape Breton, the opening of the Causeway never resulted in the much anticipated renewal of its coal and steel industries. However, it helped pave the way for what was to become a booming tourist industry. As part of the TransCanada Highway, the Causeway prompted tourists to the Island, attracting visitors to both this new technological wonder and other attractions the Island offered. All of these factors proved to be formative in shaping Cape Breton's present day economy.

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<sup>1</sup> Colin Purcell, personal interview, August 28, 1999, Mulgrave, Nova Scotia.

Despite the production of an active economy over two years with construction of the link, employing hundreds from the area, the Strait region found itself in a precarious situation after the opening of the Causeway. Resulting in the replacement of CNR's archaic ferry system employing hundreds of Strait area residents, the opening of the permanent link was disastrous. The closing of this single industry employer resulted in economic and social disaster for Strait communities such as Mulgrave and Point Tupper that grew and prospered under CNR's management of the ferry system. Creating massive unemployment because of the closure of the ferry system and the Mulgrave railway terminal, the citizens of the affected communities surrounding the Strait area were forced to look elsewhere for employment in other trades outside the region.

In an interview with *Cape Breton's Magazine*, Eva and Leonard O'Neil testified to the social and economic dislocation resulting from the opening of the Canso Causeway. O'Neil, the Mayor of Mulgrave when the Causeway opened, discussed the chronic unemployment and economic devastation and disruption to the area's communities. With CNR pulling its offices out of the Strait, many of its former employees had to search for employment elsewhere. With no possibility of finding alternative employment at home or having the financial means to move elsewhere, people were forced to sojourn in other areas of the province such as Halifax, or even outside of the province, in order to support their families who remained in the Canso area. Some railway and ferry system operators formerly employed by CNR traveled as far as Yarmouth and New Ross to work on their ferries. O'Neil explained the economic crisis

that followed the closing of CNR.

The people here made their living from the CNR. When the Canso Causeway opened, that was the end - they were all unemployed (...) there was no possibility of even selling the house. The place went flat (...).<sup>2</sup>

Those who chose to remain in the Canso area were forced to take up other trades for their livelihood and survival. Not only did this closure of the CNR offices cause economic disaster, but the subsequent social dislocation caused an equally serious crisis in the community. O'Neil explains the effects of workers going elsewhere for work to support their families: "They were tied down - it was a case of going somewhere else, renting, being separated from their families."<sup>3</sup> Eva, O'Neil's wife, explains the difficulty she had when her husband was forced to look elsewhere for employment, noting that her experience typified that of other families in the area after the Causeway opened.

You don't know the half of it. Leonard had to go to Halifax to work finally. I was here alone with the kids, he'd come home on weekends. He worked thirteen years away. I brought up the kids alone.<sup>4</sup>

Colin Purcell, resident of Mulgrave, remembers the effects of the closing of the Causeway, signifying the end of employment for hundreds in the area with no possibility for work in their chosen professions.

You know for us here in Mulgrave, for most of us it was no celebration, it was the end of our livelihood (...) Prior to the Causeway being open the town officials had contacted provincial MLAs and federal MPs and what

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<sup>2</sup> Ron Caplan, ed., "The Pulp Mill Comes to the Strait," *Cape Breton's Magazine*, No. 25 (June 1979), p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.35.

not and the end result was it was nothing they could do to help the town. (...) There were 300 families depending on the two car ferries and the railway it was a terminal, it was 300 families. (...) Their houses, they sold them for little or nothing. (...) [it was] a burial of the town, in other words, people all leaving, the towns never recovered.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the obvious devastation to the area, no immediate action was taken to repair the damage. What little provincial and national attention the crisis received was lost in the celebration of the Causeway's opening.

Reports of the effects the Causeway's opening had on the area were overshadowed by the celebration surrounding the structure's completion. The few reported stories addressing the Causeway's effects on local residents were far from the front pages of the newspapers. In an August 1955 edition of the *Halifax Chronicle Herald* celebrating the opening ceremonies of the Canso Causeway, one article addressed the harsh economic implications for workers in the Strait area. Entitled "Communities Near Causeway Already Experience Change," the article confirms that many of those formerly employed with CNR were forced to look for employment in other trades or hoped to secure a job working for the Yarmouth - Bar Harbour Maine ferry.<sup>6</sup> Most Strait area residents owned their homes and had to become "long distance commuters"<sup>7</sup> in order to support their families.

Despite the anticipated economic devastation of the area, little action was taken

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<sup>5</sup> Colin Purcell. Personal Interview, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> "Communities Near Causeway Already Experience Change," *Halifax Chronicle Herald*, August 13, 1955, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

by the government or CNR to provide relief or employment to those who had lost their jobs. It was apparent that the area was expected to sacrifice their livelihood for the greater provincial good, as illustrated in a letter from Premier Angus L. Macdonald to Senator Wishart Robertson in March 1949. In his correspondence the Nova Scotia Premier downplayed the economic devastation of the communities.

[S]ome of those employed by the railway at both Point Tupper and Mulgrave may be out of work for a time, but, on the other hand, the general benefit to Cape Breton and to eastern Nova Scotia ought to be a highly compensating factor.<sup>8</sup>

Little did the Premier or other provincial and federal politicians anticipate or appreciate the subsequent out-migration of the majority of CNR's former employees from the area. Colin Purcell remembers

[A] lot of the car repair crew, they called them car knockers, they went down to Sydney at that time to work and some of them went up to Stellarton and to Halifax and places and the train crew went to Yarmouth and just coincidentally at that time they put new ferries down at Ross' ferry (...) A lot of them went down to Ross' ferry to work 'course this means leaving their homes in Mulgrave (...) eventually all of them moved to Yarmouth or to Sydney.<sup>9</sup>

This flurry of out migration from the area mirrors the experience of other small communities in the region, especially those whose livelihood depended upon a single

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<sup>8</sup> Letter from Angus L. Macdonald to Wishart Robertson, March 15, 1949, PANS MG 2, Vol., 982, Folder 1 / 24.

<sup>9</sup> Colin Purcell. Personal Interview, 1999.



industry employer.<sup>10</sup>

A study conducted by George deBenedetti and Richard J. Price confirms the danger of creating a geographical area dependent solely upon one industry. In their study "Population Growth and the Industrial Structure of Maritime Small Town, 1971 - 1981" they conclude that an area dependent upon a single industry creates a highly unstable environment "in that many factors affecting the industry (are) outside the control of the local community."<sup>11</sup> The authors conclude that unstable single employer economies, such as the one found in Cape Breton and more particularly the Canso area, are subject to external forces that control their industry and are capable of destroying the region. These external forces can contribute to both negative economic and population growth. The population is adversely affected if the region in question is reliant upon traditional

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<sup>10</sup> Constance P. deRoche, *The Village, The Vertex : Adaptation to Regionalism and Development in a Complex Society*, Occasional Papers in Anthropology, No. 12, Saint Mary's University, 1985. The anthropological survey by Constance DeRoche in 1985 of the community of Benton serves to confirm that this small community's crisis of the 1940s and 1950s mirrors that experience of Mulgrave and Point Tupper. Concluding that Bentonites had to constantly adjust to the changing economic face of Cape Breton Island, its residents comprised a community that was characterized by massive and continual out-migration. The study concluded that because of constant economic change, Benton was an area where "almost no one failed to experience periodic labor migration." The small community was characterized by its constant state of economic flux, its citizens migrating to look elsewhere for economic alternatives when none surfaced in Cape Breton.

<sup>11</sup> George deBenedetti and Richard J. Price, "Population Growth and the Industrial Structure of Maritime Small Towns, 1971 - 1981," *People and Place : Studies of Small Town Life in the Maritimes*, ed. Larry McCann. (Fredericton : Acadiensis Press and Committee for Studying Small Town Life in the Maritimes, 1987), p. 197.

industries, such as coal or steel, and consequently produces a less diversified economy.<sup>12</sup> Effectively, this economic environment creates a “relatively under skilled labor force” that results in a less technologically advanced, economically driven growth economy.<sup>13</sup> Such a commentary can easily be applied to the Strait area region during the 1950s. As an area solely dependant upon CNR and its operation of the ferries and the railway terminal, the company’s closure in the Strait forced its former employees to look elsewhere for their livelihood.

In the wake of massive disruption to the Strait area, the community banded

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<sup>12</sup> The examination of out-migration from the Atlantic region began to receive serious examination in the early 1960s when much work was done relating out-migration to social conditions. A study completed by economist and statistician Kari Levitt concluded, not surprisingly, that levels of out - migration correlated directly with economic opportunities. In her study of Nova Scotia she found that “declining employment in the coal mining industry was found to be as important a sources of out - migration as the decline of the rural sector.” A study released by Atlantic Provinces Economic Council (APEC) in July 1963 entitled *Employment Requirement in the Atlantic Provinces* concluded that if output in production does not rise than “a rising average migration from the region is likely. The conclusions of the study were based on the work of D.M. Nowlan and previous studies by Levitt who statistically related the “direct relationship between out migration and economic conditions.” Levitt and Nolan’s studies concluded that the failure of Cape Breton to revive its coal and steel industries and create viable alternatives for the economy resulted in a dramatic loss of the Island’s population, a conclusion reinforced by a 1961 APEC publication entitled *The Economy of the Atlantic Region in Perspective*. This study examined the coal industry in Cape Breton and found that the area’s dependence upon the single industry was to the detriment of the Island. When a single employer or industry fails in an area solely reliant upon that industry the effects are devastating; massive out - migration from the area to find work being the most obvious. The study found that other than the steel industry there were no other major employers in the area and that “prospects for substantial new employment to replace coal mining are not bright.” Consequently, this situation created an ideal environment for out-migration.

<sup>13</sup> deBenedetti and Price, pp. 199 - 204.

together to fight for the future of their area. The urgency of the situation was obvious. By the end of April 1955 more than 200 CNR employees in the Strait area received notices that as of May 14, 1955 they no longer had jobs with the company.<sup>14</sup> Many more pink slips were pending.

In an effort to attract industry into the area, the communities of Mulgrave and Point Tupper organized themselves to explore alternative industries that would be appropriate for the area to pursue. Forming the Four County Development Association, whose membership included mayor Leonard O'Neil, the locally organized group's mandate was to lobby big industry into the area. After commissioning numerous surveys and plans of the area, the Association decided that a pulp company was the most appropriate industry to come to the Strait.

By early 1955 massive lobbying of the government to find support in attracting a pulp company to establish itself in the Strait area was starting to pay off. The Association was receiving attention from the government about its surveys and plans for economic development of the area. By February of that year the group was in serious discussion with the provincial cabinet to establish a pulp and paper mill.<sup>15</sup> The government found itself pressured by the citizens of Mulgrave who wanted the pulp and paper mill "to

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<sup>14</sup> "Dr. C.M. Nicholson to Address Development Group Meeting Friday," *Chronicle Herald*, April 20, 1955.

<sup>15</sup> "Group Asks Canso - Area Pulp Mill," *Chronicle Herald*, February 17, 1955.

offset the loss of revenue represented by the operation of the ferries”<sup>16</sup> The potential establishment of the mill received support from numerous groups in the area including Local 1 Industrial Union of Marine and Shipbuilding Workers of Canada, CCL that passed a resolution in 1955 stating “Whereas: The Canso Causeway....[will] introduce economic crisis...unless immediate steps are taken to locate the proposed pulp and paper mill in the area.”<sup>17</sup> Numerous other local organizations passed similar resolutions in attempts to make their voices heard by government.

With the modernization of the harbour created by the Canso Causeway, the area’s communities rallied and were eventually successful in attracting the much sought after new industry. The Nova Scotia Pulp Company, a branch of the Swedish pulp and paper giants Stora Kopparberg was persuaded to establish a factory in the Strait region. In a 1960 publication, the Four County Development Association extolled the virtues of the pulp company’s establishment and the advantages that would accompany it to the region. Pushing the Strait area as a highly advantageous place to establish and conduct business, the pamphlet highlighted attractions of the area including the modern Canso Causeway that facilitated improved communication and transportation. Evolved into an area offering “year round shipping facilities easily accessible to domestic and foreign

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<sup>16</sup> “Port Hawkesbury and Mulgrave May Benefit,” *Chronicle Herald*, March 23, 1955. .

<sup>17</sup> “Union Asks Government to Back Mulgrave Mill,” *Chronicle Herald*, March 25, 1955.

markets,”<sup>18</sup> the Association argued that had the Causeway not been constructed with its seven mile long harbour, Stora may not have established its company in the region.

The province’s courting of pulp and paper companies to come to Nova Scotia had been going on for decades prior to Stora’s establishment in the Strait. The enactment of the 1899 Lease Act signified the beginning of Nova Scotia policy intended to “promote forest management and raise revenue from Crown lands,” by making available 20 year timberland leases with a subsequent option to renew.<sup>19</sup> The Big Lease, covering 620,000 acres in Victoria and Inverness counties of Cape Breton, was an initiative by the provincial Conservative government of Robert Stanfield in 1957. The government’s aim was the re-appropriation of land leased by Angus L. Macdonald in 1936 for the Cape Breton Highlands Park so that it could use the acreage as an incentive to attract Stora into the province.<sup>20</sup> Providing concessions to the pulp mills through the Big Lease made the province a highly attractive place for the pulp and paper industry to conduct business. However, as Anders Sandberg argues, the government re-appropriated the lease, but at a considerable cost, providing concessions intended solely at attracting Stora into the Strait.<sup>21</sup> Such concessions included stumpage rates at the low cost of \$1 per cord (a price

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<sup>18</sup> “Industry Heading Straight for the Strait,” 4 County Development Association, 1960.

<sup>19</sup> L. Anders Sandberg, “Forest Policy in Nova Scotia : The Big Lease, Cape Breton Island, 1899 - 1960,” *Acadiensis*, Vol. XX, No. 2, (Spring 1991), pp.105, 125.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 127 - 8.

given to companies thirty years before) and the government's assurance to Stora that the company was guaranteed the lease upon its establishment in the Strait.<sup>22</sup> As Sandberg concludes, "the premier's major concern during this period was to secure a commitment from Stora and the content of the agreement seemed secondary."<sup>23</sup> No doubt these hefty concessions helped pave the way for the establishment of Stora in Cape Breton. The first major industry into the province in twenty-five years, Stora would expand to become, and continue to be, the major employer in the area. Although Stora has continued to expand and has proved a more successful and viable industry than CNR in the area, the Strait has essentially replicated its economic situation, trading its sole reliance upon the ferry system to that of the pulp industry.

Despite its single industry status, the establishment of Stora in the Strait area signified a new economic and industrial base that, when opened in 1963, employed a total of 30 people in the mill itself with an additional 1,000 people working in the woods. As noted by Sandberg, the importance of the establishment of Stora should not be underestimated. Suffering from harsh economic depression because of its failing coal and steel industries, resulting in high unemployment in the province, especially on Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia was in dire need of jobs and Stora helped to restore prosperity, if only to the isolated Canso area.<sup>24</sup> A study by Peter Twohig of the Pulp and

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

Paper industry in Nova Scotia confirms the economic impact the establishment of Stora had on the region.

Construction expenditures topped \$42 million, generating wages and salaries of \$25 million. By 1966, the average income in Port Hawkesbury was twenty percent above the provincial average, whereas five years before it had been thirty percent lower. In the counties of Richmond and Inverness, average incomes were raised by twenty-five percent and forty-five percent, respectively. The first five years (1961 - 1966) saw the company pay \$23 million for pulpwood deliveries and by 1966, 423 regular employees and 130 casual employees worked at the Point Tupper mill.<sup>25</sup>

As a part of the TransCanada Highway, the Canso Causeway also played a key role in modernizing the region by providing a new and more efficient means of accessibility to and from Cape Breton and, by extension, Newfoundland. This idea of accessibility was closely linked to the idea of developing industry on the Island, especially the beginning of the province's tourism industry and the continued possibility of a much sought after revival of the coal and steel industries. Like other provinces such as Newfoundland, Nova Scotia was looking to attract tourists through this new "post war period of economic expansion"<sup>26</sup> and capitalized on this through the Causeway.

The importance of accessibility provided by the Canso Causeway and the TransCanada Highway grew with the increase in motor vehicle use, a modern phenomena

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 123 - 124.

<sup>25</sup> Peter Twohig, "A Preliminary Report on Pulp and Paper Manufacture in Nova Scotia, 1900 - 1970," March 12, 1992, p. 65.

<sup>26</sup> James Overton, "Coming Home : Nostalgia and Tourism in Newfoundland," *Acadiensis*, Vol. XIV, No. 1, (Autumn 1984), p. 95.

whose importance cannot be overstated. With the construction of the vehicle - friendly projects mentioned above, the province was providing new accessibility aimed at serving tourists in the area. Improvements in transportation, including the upgrading of the province's highways continued throughout the decade.<sup>27</sup>

Chris Brown, in his study of the development of tourism in Nova Scotia, noted the importance of automobile use.

Throughout the 1950s tourism in Nova Scotia changed dramatically in character and content. The fantastic upsurge in automobile travel and the accompanying massive development and improvement of the province's highway system drastically altered the orientation of the industry. The trend was toward highly seasonal, relatively short term family vacations. The industry responded to this trend by going thorough a period of sporadic small scale development.<sup>28</sup>

Brown's examination of the tourist industry concludes that not until the post Second World War era did the provincial government seriously promote and develop the tourism sector as a viable industry. Noting the massive expenditures on transportation and highway structures during this period, Brown suggests that the province was slow to develop "administrative units to develop this [tourism] potential."<sup>29</sup> Although tourism

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<sup>27</sup> For discussion of improvement in highway conditions to promote tourism see letter from C.P. Disney, Engineer to Macdonald, June 15, 1946, PANS, MG 2, Vol. 981, Folder 1 / 14.

<sup>28</sup> Christopher Brown, *The Nova Scotia Department of Tourism and the British Columbia Department of Travel Industry: A Structural Comparison*, (Halifax: Dalhousie University, 1976), pp. 10 - 11.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23. It should be noted that Tourist Bureau fell under the Bureau of Information in 1942, the Department of Industry and Trade in 1948, the Nova Scotia Bureau of Trade in 1951, the Department of Trade and Industry once again in 1955, the



was taking center stage for industry in the province, administratively the Nova Scotia government was slow to react, not creating a Ministry of Tourism until July 1971. A further study commissioned by the Province of Nova Scotia noted the impact of the highway on tourist visits.

[T]hat one noticeable development, which surely has influenced this change in traffic patterns, is the completion of a major portion of the TransCanada Highway in Cape Breton, leading tourists directly from the Canso Causeway to Baddeck<sup>30</sup>

As an integral part of the TransCanada Highway the Canso Causeway and Cape Breton Island were now connected with a national project aimed at transcending provincial borders. In his thesis, "Canada's New Mainstreet: The TransCanada Highway as Idea and Reality, 1912 - 1956," David Monaghan traces the importance of the highway as a symbol of nation building and as a means of economic rehabilitation. He argues that the highway was used both as a weapon against unemployment and as a means to attract the tourist dollar into the provinces. The highway was an important national project and the revenue it generated through its promotion as a tourist attraction provided "excellent rationale for increasing public expenditures on highways and strongly reinforced the highway's image as an investment rather than ongoing consumption."<sup>31</sup>

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Nova Scotia Travel Bureau in 1961 and finally a Ministry of Tourism was created in July 1971. Regionally, Nova Scotia was slow to react when compared with Prince Edward Island's Ministry of Tourism that had been established a over a decade earlier in 1960.

<sup>30</sup> *Tourism - Recreation Facility Development Study of the Province of Nova Scotia*, (New York: Development Counselors International Limited, 196(?)).

<sup>31</sup> Davis Monaghan, "Canada's New Mainstreet : The TransCanada Highway as Idea

In an article entitled "The TransCanada Highway: A Stimulant to Canadian Development," Edward Morton also examines the importance of this national reconstruction project, tracing the economic development in each province and the importance of the project in developing a base for a national tourist industry.<sup>32</sup> Creating 12 million days of employment, the project was an accomplishment for the whole country. While the federal government provided for most of the financing for the highway itself, the provincial government was continuing to fund spin - off developments, such as the expansion of camp and picnic grounds.<sup>33</sup> In Nova Scotia the construction of five provincial parks by 1963 was a direct result of the highway, with several more parks slated for construction in the future, as a means of attracting more visitors to the area.

Many provincial studies have examined the rising tourist industry in the province and how it could be improved in both the accommodation of and increasing the stay of visitors following the opening of the Causeway. One report, *A Statistical Analysis of Tourists Visiting Nova Scotia in 1956*, concluded that although the natural attraction of the Island was in itself incentive enough for tourists, the province lacked adequate accommodation and transportation facilities to cater to visitors. As an industry tourism was growing in its importance in the eyes of the provincial government but there

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and Reality, 1912 - 1956," MA Thesis, (Ottawa: University of Ottawa, 1997), p. 13.

<sup>32</sup> Edward Morton, "The TransCanada Highway : A Stimulant to Canadian Development," *Canadian Geographic Journal*, Vol. LXVII, No. 3, (September 1963), pp. 74 - 91.

remained many areas which required improvement in order to create a viable industry. The report in its "Conclusions and Recommendations" revealed that the province desperately needed to improve accommodation facilities and coordinate a cohesive tourism strategy for the province.

[The province has] failed to supplement natural attractions with adequate facilities which might encourage the tourist to extend his stay or return for future visits. We believe that, if Nova Scotia is to be made more attractive to tourists, some mechanism must be found that will integrate the various businesses, associations, and groups concerned into a cohesive unit having a common goal, as well as the ability to attack through a coordinated and planned program some of the major tourist destinations.<sup>34</sup>

These recommendations point to the importance of the integration of community with business to serve the tourist industry. In his Master's thesis, Gerald Gabriel confirms the importance of this form of integration, focusing on community economic development. He correlates a rise in importance in tourism with community development in the Atlantic Canada region in the post war era, concluding that the more cohesive a community the better it is able to cope during times of crises and prosperity. Gabriel notes a rise in social and cultural self awareness in communities and certain areas that were able to take control of their economic development and survival.<sup>35</sup> This conclusion is pertinent not only to the Atlantic Canada region but also to communities elsewhere that

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>34</sup> *A Statistical Analysis of Tourists Visiting Nova Scotia in 1956 : A Draft Report to the Province of Nova Scotia*, May 3, 1957 (Arthur D. Little Inc).

<sup>35</sup> Gerald Gabriel, "Towards a Community Approach to Tourism Development in Atlantic Canada," MA Thesis, (Halifax: Saint Mary's University, 1996).

are dependant upon tourism.<sup>36</sup>

This reliance upon tourism as an alternative industry to coal and steel was promoted at various levels of government and received encouragement from Nova Scotia's influential Premier, Angus L. Macdonald. The Premier's aim was to promote and enhance tourism instead of the coal and steel industries that consistently found themselves the victims of strikes, labour disputes and cuts in subsidies from the government. Emphasizing the decline of these traditional industries, Macdonald stated that he hoped to see financial injection into the province to promote tourism. In a 1946 letter to C.D. Howe, Minister of Reconstruction and Supply, Macdonald stated

I do not think any federal action should be restricted only to development of mining areas. There are other resources in the country besides mining which, over the long run, are of much greater value to the country than mining which is a wasting asset. I do not see why, for instance, an area that has great tourist advantages, such as the Cape Breton Highlands National Park, should not stand in the same position as a mining area in this regard. We regard the tourist industry as one of our great industries in the province, and we look on the Cape Breton Park as one of our major tourist attractions. It is, of course, necessary to have good roads leading to the Park. Such roads would assist in the development of an asset that would endure as long as the province itself, and that could be made more attractive and more lucrative with each year, instead of diminishing in value each year as a mining property does.<sup>37</sup>

In his response to Macdonald, Howe claimed that the federal government had been "for some time aware of the economic situation in Cape Breton"<sup>38</sup> and stated that the federal

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<sup>36</sup> Peter E. Murphy, *Tourism : A Community Approach*, (New York: Metheun, 1985) pp. 117 - 151; 153 - 154.

<sup>37</sup> Letter from Angus L. Macdonald to C.D. Howe, Minister of Reconstruction and Supply, March 18, 1946, PANS MG 2, Vol. 897, Folder 18 C / 5.

government wished to promote economic development in the depressed area. This is an ironic statement by Howe considering he did not believe the Maritimes capable of industrial economic development.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, Macdonald's statement illustrates the drive to encourage the development of tourism in Cape Breton. The explosion of tourism in places such as Cheticamp, Baddeck, and Louisbourg, communities located outside of the traditional industrial area of the Sydney - Glace Bay - New Waterford area, successfully drove the center of Cape Breton's tourism activity, which, to this day continues to be a highly lucrative industry in the area.

This rise in tourism correlated with the federal government's recognition of the fall in the coal and steel industries. Concepts of modernizing the region were associated with transforming and controlling both its industry and development<sup>40</sup> although reconstruction initiatives such as the Canso Causeway never produced the much anticipated economic revival of the coal and steel sector. When the Canso Causeway first opened it was viewed as a major step aimed at improving transportation to and from the Island, including exportation of coal and steel off the Island at a highly competitive rate.

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<sup>38</sup> Letter from Howe to Macdonald, April 4, 1946, MG 2, Vol. 897, Folder 18 C / 7, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> E.R. Forbes, "Consolidating Disparity : The Maritimes and the Industrialization of Canada during the Second World War," *Acadiensis*, Vol. XV, No. 2, (Spring 1986), pp. 3 - 27.

<sup>40</sup> Della Stanley, "The 1960s : The Illusions and Realities of Progress," in *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, eds. E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise, (Toronto and Fredericton: University of Toronto and Acadiensis Press, 1993), pp. 422 - 430.

Ironically, the structure that was touted as the savior to facilitate exports from the steel and coal industries, turned into a major push for Cape Breton to heavily promote the tourist industry.

Since the late nineteenth century, economically depressed Cape Breton had depended upon growth and prosperity from the coal and steel industries. The historical reliance upon these two industries further entrenched the extremely precarious economic environment on the Island. The downturn of coal and steel in the 1930s resulted in a heavy reliance upon government for support, creating regional dependence that grew until the Second World War. This dependence was explored in depth in various Royal Commissions that continually cast doubt upon the possibility of the industry's renewal. Recommendations coming from numerous Royal Commissions called for the diversification of the economy by focusing on areas such as tourism to serve as a complementary sector to the coal and steel industries that had been suffering for decades. During the Second World War the coal industry was crippled by numerous events, including the miner's slowdown strike of 1941, a protest by workers hoping to obtain fair wages and union recognition.<sup>41</sup> Industrial contracts favoring Central Canadian steel manufacturers during WWII also hindered steel production in Sydney.<sup>42</sup>

Eventually, reliance upon coal and steel was replaced with federal and provincial

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<sup>41</sup> Michael Earle, " 'Down With Hitler and Silby Barrett' : The Cape Breton Miners Slowdown Strike of 1941," *Acadiensis*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1 (Autumn 1988), pp. 56 - 90.

<sup>42</sup> Forbes, "Consolidating Disparity."

promotion of tourism as a viable economic alternative to mining and steel production, an attitude that was reflected in several Royal Commissions. As early as the 1944 *Royal Commission on Provincial Development and Rehabilitation*, it was recommended that the Island seriously look towards the development of the tourism sector to replace the coal and steel industry.<sup>43</sup>

In August 1960 the *Report of the Royal Commissions on Coal* under the direction of Canadian Supreme Court Chief Justice Ivan Rand was released, its conclusions marking the death of the coal mining industry in Cape Breton.<sup>44</sup> The Commission discussed the dangerous economic situation in Cape Breton and concluded that a region whose economy depended upon one or two industries, faced an extremely unstable economic environment, liable to seriously hinder future development and prosperity.

A single extractive industry, by its nature, is not a desirable economic base for a community and in coal there are incidental accompaniments that render it more undesirable than others. For the Sydney - Glace Bay - Louisbourg district alternative and supporting economic and cultural activities must be considered, a scheme adequate to introduce new wealth into Cape Breton.<sup>45</sup>

Its report encouraged the Island to look towards other industries to help inject much needed growth and prosperity into the region. The report wanted to see an “elevation of mind and spirit” and encouraged the citizens of the Island to look towards the “natural

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<sup>43</sup>     *The Nova Scotia Report to the Royal Commission on Provincial Development and Rehabilitation, “Tourism Industry,”*(Nova Scotia, 1944).

<sup>44</sup>     *Report of the Royal Commission on Coal*, (Ottawa, August 1960).

<sup>45</sup>     *Ibid.*, p. 46.

and historical endowment as the sources of new interests [as] undoubtedly there are resources of this nature for full exploitation.”<sup>46</sup> The report encouraged the Island to focus on its tourism industry, including the development of the Fortress of Louisbourg, the National Highland Park and its connecting highway system. It also examined the conditions of the roads and highways in the province and, as part of the promotion of tourists into the Louisbourg area, called for assistance in conjunction with the provincial government in “completing a modern highway.”<sup>47</sup> The Commission recommended improvements to the highways both to Louisbourg and surrounding the Cape Breton Highlands National Park to help promote and facilitate tourism into the area. Complementing this new highway system the Commission’s final report advised that the reconstruction of the Fortress of Louisbourg starts no later than 1961 in hopes of generating temporary employment for unemployed coal miners.<sup>48</sup> Intended as a make work project for those who lost their jobs from the closure of mines, the reconstruction would be the largest and the most expensive National Parks effort to date.<sup>49</sup> The Fortress’ reconstruction illustrates the direct role the federal government played in the economic revival of the region, and point to the continued adherence to Keynesian

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, Recommendation #13.

<sup>48</sup> Terry MacLean, *Louisbourg Heritage : From Ruins to Reconstruction*, (Sydney: University College of Cape Breton Press, 1995), pp. 19 - 23.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*



economic theories.<sup>50</sup>

In advocating tourism, the Commission followed suit with the rest of the province in promoting Cape Breton as a Scottish haven, recommending that subsidies derived from the government to support the coal industry instead be diverted to support tourism. It encouraged the province to promote and essentially create the Island as a displaced Scottish haven.

[T]he Western heath of the Scottish people, from many parts of North America and to a lesser extent, from Scotland, would come not only men and women seeking pleasant scenes and enjoyable pursuits, but haunted by intimations of ancient northern music, there to catch fleeting recognition of voices of ages past, sought and welcomed as a relief from the weight and humdrum of ordinary existence. It is a unique land, a fit place for such a national purpose.<sup>51</sup>

Development of the Highlands National Park and other tourist attractions throughout the Cape Breton area were intended to create the illusion of the area being predominantly of Scottish heritage.

In May 1966 another Royal Commission, chaired by J.R. Donald, tabled its report on mining in Cape Breton. The report's aim was to examine "the dependence of the Cape Breton economy, and to a lesser extent, that of Nova Scotia, on the coal mining industry and the costs of the federal government of sustaining these operations."<sup>52</sup> Entitled *The Problem of Coal Mining in Cape Breton*, the report reiterated the findings of the Royal Commission on coal in 1960. Noting the volatile economic situation on the Island, the

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<sup>50</sup> Stanley, "The 1960s : The Illusion and Realities of Progress," pp. 434 - 435.

<sup>51</sup> *Royal Commission on Coal*, p. 48.

Commission recommended the federal government cut off its continual flow of subsidies and assistance to the coal industry. Without federal government assistance, the Commission noted

the market for Nova Scotia coal would have been cut in half. Such a drastic reduction in markets and, hence, in output - if it had occurred - would have pushed the operating cost per ton for the remaining output to such high levels that it is doubtful if any of the Dosco mines could have continued in operation. Although the costly provision of oil equalization assistance enabled the Dosco mines to continue operations, it only postponed the Company's arrival at its present critical position.<sup>53</sup>

The Commission found that while the industry employed 7,500 people, it did so at the cost of relying heavily on the 22 million dollar subsidies provided by the federal government.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, the coal and steel industries combined employed a total of 10,500 and provided a livelihood for over one third of wage earners in the Sydney - Glace Bay district.<sup>55</sup>

The Commission addressed the social and economic problems that had been generated from the Island's reliance upon the coal industry and found that alternative economic industries and employment opportunities must be put forward in anticipation of, what the Commission saw as, the maximum of 15 years the coal industry had left in Cape Breton. This estimated 15 years included accounting for continued federal support through subsidies. The Commission noted employment opportunities outside of the coal

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<sup>52</sup> *The Cape Breton Coal Problem*, (Ottawa: Queen's Printers, May 1966), p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5 - 6.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

and steel sectors must be generated in order to accommodate and provide a future for the Island's residents. The report found that the failing coal industry had deep implications for the area's residents, and even more so for those youths who were looking for a future on the Island. The report concluded that expansion of the economic base in Cape Breton was crucial to the Island's survival and that if this base did not expand, the future for youths in the area was not assured, undoubtedly forcing extensive out migration to look for adequate employment elsewhere.

It is ethically wrong and economically unsound to be introducing young people into the mining force where there is no assurance of future employment; where operations are basically unprofitable, and where no skills useful in other fields except mining are required.<sup>56</sup>

The diversification of the economy in other areas of the province was addressed by the Commission's report noting that Stora's pulp mill recent establishment in the Strait area serve as an example of "Nova Scotia's resources to serve export markets" whose "opportunities are not limited to local resources."<sup>57</sup>

However, despite its dire predictions of the traditional Cape Breton economy, the coal and steel industries would continue to be subsidized by the federal government with help through the establishment of the Cape Breton Development Corporation (Devco). Throughout the 1960s, the economy and development of Atlantic Canada centered around "politically generated policies, institutions and programs" aimed at controlling industry in

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 2 - 4.

<sup>56</sup> *The Cape Breton Coal Problem*, pp. 19 and 34.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23 - 24.

the region.<sup>58</sup> Focusing on government fact - finding initiatives such as Royal Commissions and the importance of regional organizations such as the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council (APEC) and the Atlantic Development Board (ADB), these organizations demonstrate support for economic and industrial development in the region.<sup>59</sup>

While Cape Breton has experienced massive changes in its economic base since the establishment of the coal and steel industries, many elements of its employment base have not changed. Studying the economic history of a region like Cape Breton helps in adding to the history of economic underdevelopment of the region. Remaining an especially underdeveloped area in Atlantic Canada, Cape Breton's experience helps to explain the economic dependence the region has maintained, whether it is on the federal government or the tourist dollar. Although tourism worked to promote economic development in the rural regions of Cape Breton, tearing its industrial base away from the Sydney - Glace Bay area, the Island never succeeded in diversifying its economy. With the exception of Stora in the Canso Strait no further successful industrial base developed on the Island.

The phasing out of the coal and steel industries remained a trend that continues until present day with Devco's 1999 announcement of the closing Phalen mine and the

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<sup>58</sup> Stanley, pp. 422 - 430.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, and Rick Williams, "The World is in Chaos : The Future Looks Bright," *Towards a New Maritimes*, eds. Ian McKay and Scott Milson (Ragweed Press, 1992), pp.

privatization of the Prince mine, which has forced both the federal and provincial governments to explore other options for economic renewal on the Island. Unfortunately for Cape Breton the expansion of complementary industries only amounted to development of tourism. The Island's single economy reliance remains in-tact, with what some would argue, is an even more volatile industry.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis has explored numerous social, cultural, political, and economic issues surrounding the Canso Causeway. In doing so it has traced the history, impact, and legacy of the structure on Nova Scotia and, in particular, Cape Breton Island. It has examined both the history of the Causeway and how perceptions of this structure have changed over time. Originally construed as an integral component in the modernization of the coal and steel industries, it has since evolved into the symbolic gateway for both tourists and Cape Breton's citizens to, what many perceive as, a quaint and idyllic society.

This idea has played out in the evolution of the Island's industry base. Since the Causeway's construction, Cape Breton's economy has become reliant on the tourism industry, with a reputed one billion dollars in revenue in the first half of the 1990s alone. Developments in the Nova Scotia offshore oil and gas industry have also had an important impact on the province, and in particular, the Strait region. These explorations started during the late 1990s have revealed a rich energy resource potential. However, despite these explorations, Cape Breton's economy has remained relatively stunted.

Yet how does the Canso Causeway fit into this picture? As an inevitable sign of progress, the structure modernized transportation to and from the Island, helping to facilitate potential industrial growth and making it accessible to tourists. As a major post-war reconstruction project the Canso Causeway also fit into the aims of the country, providing employment and helping to ease the economy into peace-time activity. Above all, however, for Cape Bretoners, the Canso Causeway is a strong cultural symbol whose

history and legacy epitomizes the region's history and position within Canada.



## **Bibliography**

My examination of the Canso Causeway began in 1997 at Carleton University when I was in my fourth year of my B.A., at the prompting of Professor Del Muise, who generously suggested the topic as a possible area of study. During the 1997 - 1998 academic year, my research focused on numerous government printed sources available at both the National Library and the National Archives in Ottawa. This included examination of numerous Royal Commissions and the province of Nova Scotia's reports to these inquiries. The bulk of this resulting research is found in chapters two and three of this thesis.

In September 1998, I entered the Masters in Atlantic Canada Studies program at Saint Mary's University in Halifax, where I was able to focus my research on provincial sources. During that year, I concentrated my attention on those sources available at the Public Archives of Nova Scotia (PANS). The bulk of this research focused on examination of the Angus L. Macdonald papers, provincial newspapers (including the Halifax Chronicle Herald and the Post Record), numerous publications produced for the Causeway's opening celebrations, and tourist literature promoting Cape Breton Island's new accessibility as a result of the Causeway. These sources largely comprise the research behind chapters three and four.

Research at the Beaton Institute at the University College of Cape Breton also proved an important source for original songs, poetry and literature written about the Causeway. Research during the summer of 1999 also led me to the Strait area where I conducted research at the Gut of Canso Museum and Archives in Port Hastings.

Speaking with numerous residents of the Strait area led to my interview with Colin Purcell on August 28, 1999, who proved an invaluable source of information. Not only was his experience as a long time resident of Mulgrave important for situating the story of the Causeway in the provincial and national contexts, but most importantly, he effectively related the impact of the Canso Causeway on those residents of the Strait area.

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