

‘Our Nation is like a withering leaf on a summer’s day’:  
The Mi’kmaq and British Agricultural Policies in Colonial Nova Scotia

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A Thesis Submitted to  
Saint Mary’s University, Halifax, Nova Scotia  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Arts in History

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Halifax, Nova Scotia

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Date: August 23, 2016

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**Abstract**

This thesis examines Mi’kmaq-British relations in regards to agricultural policies in colonial Nova Scotia in the nineteenth century. Beginning in the early eighteenth century, British colonizers in Nova Scotia, a portion of the territory known by its indigenous inhabitants as Mi’kma’ki, sought to reform Mi’kmaq people’s concepts and utilization of land through agricultural policies. They hoped that in doing so, the Mi’kmaq would become stationary instead of transient, and ultimately be “civilized.” Although the Mi’kmaq never became the agriculturalists the British envisioned, they did participate in sporadic farming activities and made active use of the British legal system to petition the government for various aids and rights. This thesis argues that although the agricultural policies the British hoped would “civilize” the Mi’kmaq fell short of their intended outcome, Mi’kmaq communities negotiated their pressures and possibilities, managing to use agricultural opportunities to alleviate difficult social and economic circumstances.

August 23, 2016

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. John G. Reid, for all of his invaluable help and patience this past year. His guidance and advice extended beyond the confines of this thesis. I would also like to thank him for his help with doctoral and scholarship applications, and for feedback on decisions regarding both. I am really thankful and grateful to have had the opportunity to work under Dr. Reid. It has truly been an honour. I also owe a debt of gratitude to SSHRC as this project was generously funded through one of their CGS Joseph-Armand Bombardier scholarships.

That gratitude extends to the entire Saint Mary's University History faculty. A special thank you to the professors I was lucky enough to have had this past year: Dr. Reid, Dr. Nicole Neatby, Dr. Blake Brown, and Dr. Jim Morrison. All of your classes were such good experiences, and of course extremely informative and valuable in both the knowledge and skills they offered. As well, I am also grateful to the professors I did not have the chance to have had classes with. From the very first day the entire History faculty welcomed me with open arms, and every person in this community has helped shape this thesis in one way or another. Thank you all.

This community was not restricted to just Saint Mary's University. I would like to once again thank the History professors at Mount Saint Vincent University who helped me this past year, with this thesis as well as decisions for the future. I am incredibly grateful for their continued support, especially Dr. Martha Walls, Dr. Corey Slumkoski, and Dr. Leslie Baker.

Speaking of community, I cannot express enough acknowledgements for the fellow students who underwent this thesis process with me. A special thank you goes out to Brandon Callahan. I count my lucky stars every day for having met him. All of our adventures and discussions this past year have made me a better academic and moreover a better person. This thesis would not be what it is today without his unending support and encouragement; whether it was going to every conference with me, the countless hours spent studying in the library, or the many travels and good times. Thank you. I love you and am excited for everything our future holds. To James During, thank you so much for being there for me, be it in the form of listening to my belly-aching, offering insightful suggestions for this thesis, working together, or simply being the best office mate. You have helped more than you know. And of course, a thank you to Eric Franklin, Amber Rolfe, and Laura Carter, who were also a part of this student community. Thank you all for your help and guidance and above all your friendships.

A big thank you to my thesis committee: Dr. Reid, Dr. Neatby, Dr. John Munro, and Dr. Walls. I am very thankful you were all available and willing to be a part of this process and I am extremely grateful for you all.

This acknowledgements page would not be complete without thanking my family. Kenneth Mrazek and Kendall Mrazek, thank you for being my biggest supporters and toughest rocks. I appreciate you both more than I could ever adequately express; it is a good thing there will be at least one more thesis to try! I love you both to the moon and back. Finally, thank you to my mother, who showed me what true strength is, and taught me how to appreciate life in good times and bad. She is my hero and inspires me every day. I dedicate this thesis to her.

With all of these acknowledgements being said, I wish to take full responsibility for any and all mistakes in this thesis.

**Dedication**

*For*

*Margaret Florence Mrazek 1965-2007*

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**Chapter One:**  
**Introduction**



Europeans imposed ideologies and practices on Indigenous people when they colonized the Americas.<sup>1</sup> British ideas surrounding land tenure and use were important ideological beliefs in regards to what was considered a “civilized” society. Drawing on theories of property ownership articulated in John Locke’s *The Second Treatise of Government*, British conceptions of private property ownership, proper land use, and the rights of individuals to land, led colonizers to the conclusion that Indigenous land, which served as a base for a wide range of pursuits (but not for farming), was being ineffectively used.<sup>2</sup> Locke’s political philosophy was originally published in 1690 and was influential in shaping European ideologies concerning land, especially in regards to private ownership. These ideologies were instrumental in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries during European colonization of what would become known as British North America. The crux of Locke’s philosophy was that all land is at default collectively owned. Private ownership of land only occurs through labour – the most effective labour being land cultivation. Beginning in the early eighteenth century, British colonizers in Nova Scotia, a territory known by its Indigenous inhabitants as Mi’kma’ki, sought to reform Mi’kmaw people’s concepts and utilization of land through various agricultural policies. They

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis follows the convention by which ‘Mi’kmaq’ is used as a plural noun, while ‘Mi’kmaw’ is both the singular noun as well as the corresponding adjective. Mi’kma’ki refers to the Mi’kmaw territory that extended throughout the present-day Maritime provinces. Geographically, this thesis generally uses the modern day borders of Nova Scotia for its scope (mainland Nova Scotia and Cape Breton) in discussing the colony of Nova Scotia, although some examples are drawn from modern day New Brunswick that would have been part of ‘old’ Nova Scotia during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

<sup>2</sup> See John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1952).

hoped that in doing so, Mi'kmaq people would become stationary instead of transient, and, ultimately, gradually be "civilized."

them. The whole of our people in Nova Scotia is about 1500. In that number 106 died in the year 1846, and the number of deaths in 1848 is we believe 94. We were never in a worse condition than when you began to give us aid. We still suffer for clothes, and for victuals. We cannot sell our baskets and other works, the times are so hard. Our potatoes and wheat have been destroyed three two years, and many good people have nothing to give. Where shall we go? What shall we do. Our old people and young children cannot live - Our Nation is like a withering leaf on a summer's day. Some of your people say we are lazy, still we work. If you say we must go and hunt, we tell you again that to hunt is one thing and to live is another. (The paper) catch

Figure 1: The title of this thesis came from this petition: "Our Nation is like a withering leaf on a summer's day." Petition of the Chiefs and Captains of the Micmac Indians of Nova Scotia for aid to make farms. 8 February 1849. Series P RG 5 Vol. 45, NSA.

This study examines the evolution of Mi'kmaq-British relations in Nova Scotia with regard to agricultural policies in the nineteenth century, up to Confederation in 1867. It considers the interactions of Indigenous, imperial, and colonial dimensions present in Nova Scotia at this time. The approach of analyzing British imperial and colonial relations with the Mi'kmaq in colonial Nova Scotia cannot answer all questions regarding the complex texture of the encounter between Indigenous societies and settler

colonization in a geographically diverse region, where both Indigenous and colonial cultures and experiences varied over time and space. It can, however, illuminate the changing Indigenous-British relationship specifically with regard to policies in colonial Nova Scotia. The changing attitudes and approaches to agricultural policies, from both the Mi'kmaq as well as colonial and imperial British players, displays the erosion of diplomatic and military safeguards that had previously been available to Indigenous leaders and communities, as long as the possibility of multiple hostilities persisted, as well as perceived threats from the Mi'kmaq. This erosion grew with the advent of settler colonization in increasing measure after the Loyalist migration, in favour of policies that provided initially small sums of relief (the foundation of which was the gift-giving and friendship that characterized the Mi'kmaq's relationship with imperial British officials early on), followed by a policy of settling Indigenous people on reserves while attempting to foster agricultural policies.

In the nineteenth century the British encouraged, with a good deal of coercion, British agricultural practices among the Mi'kmaq. This colonial undertaking was to serve a number of purposes. First, agriculture was intended to instill among the Mi'kmaq people British concepts of land use and in this way to "civilize" them. This meant inducing them to respect British concepts of private property (and wider concepts of British law) and instilling among them idealized European family relations and gender roles. Farming promised to make the Mi'kmaq more industrious. European farming practices were also intended to serve as a corrective to the mobility, tribal affiliations, lack of industry, chaotic social relations, and immorality that was said to characterize Mi'kmaq ways of life. The French Jesuits, in their *Jesuit Relations*, first recorded these features attributed to Indigenous people. While "lessons" of agricultural engagement were

central to a British desire to “civilize” the Mi’kmaq, agriculture was also to serve the more practical purposes of rendering colonial territory more valuable and of making the Mi’kmaq financially self-sufficient. In short, agriculture would allow the Mi’kmaq to bear the costs of their own “civilization.”

Ultimately, the Mi’kmaq did not become the agriculturalists the British envisioned. The lack of British commitment to supporting the initiative (they were strong on the rhetoric of civilization but weak on financial support), as well as the social, economic, and political conditions that prevailed in Mi’kmaq communities that were committed to their own cultural practices, family structures, and recognition of their own best interests, undermined the agenda of this British colonization project. However, Mi’kmaq people across Nova Scotia did engage in sporadic farming activities, and used the active British legal system to petition for various agricultural tools and seeds needed to participate in farming. This thesis argues that although the agricultural policies that the British ultimately hoped would “civilize” the Mi’kmaq fell short of their intended outcome, the Mi’kmaq negotiated its pressures and possibilities, managing to use the idea of agricultural opportunities to alleviate difficult social and economic circumstances. Mi’kmaq families across the province engaged in a mixed economy whereby men and women used their time and labour working for wages, sometimes pursuing agricultural opportunities, while maintaining traditional practices of seasonal migration.

On the topic of Locke’s theories and philosophies impacting colonialism, Barbara Arneil’s *John Locke and America: The Defence of English Colonialism* is unparalleled.<sup>3</sup> This book is crucial for contextualizing the importance the British placed on Locke’s

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<sup>3</sup> See Barbara Arneil, *John Locke and America: The Defence of English Colonialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

private property theories, as well as for understanding how important abstract ideas are in relation to political and economic developments. She focuses on how Locke's philosophies impacted British relations with Indigenous peoples in North America, culminating in private land policies and laws. Although she largely focuses on American Indigenous peoples, her work is nonetheless important for contextualizing social relations intersecting agricultural policies in colonial Nova Scotia.

As well, Cole Harris addresses Locke's theories in *Making Native Space: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times*. He discusses Locke's theory of private property and its impact on social relations between Indigenous peoples and the British in what would become North America. He argues that Europeans imported Locke's ideology of labour and property with them to British North America and saw agriculture was an engine of environmental change, with the British seeing houses, fields, and fences as tangible markers of occupation and ownership. This ownership was acquired by action rather than by word, and created an indicator of possession on the landscape. Harris's discussion of farming and building property surrounding agricultural cultivation is important for contextualizing agricultural policies implemented in Nova Scotia, following the same ideas of Locke's on private property leading to "civilization."

Context is extremely important in any scholarly discipline, especially within history. John Tosh includes context as the second principle of historical awareness, stating in his study on methodology, *The Pursuit of History*: "the subject of our enquiry must not be wrenched from its setting."<sup>4</sup> This thesis uses secondary sources to provide context for its argument and to adhere to the concept of historical awareness. Historical processes framing "the relationship between events over time which endows them with

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<sup>4</sup> John Tosh, "Raw Materials," in *The Pursuit of History* (Harlow England: Longman, 1999), 8.

more significance than if they were viewed in isolation” are inextricably connected to context.<sup>5</sup> By contextualizing the complex colonial politics between European powers and the Mi’kmaq in Nova Scotia in relation to the shifting social and economic roles the Mi’kmaq held in relation to agricultural activities, this thesis endeavours to contribute to historical awareness as well as respect difference; another principle of historical awareness that Tosh defines as “recognition of the gulf which separates our own age from all previous ages.”<sup>6</sup> One of the ways in which this thesis respects difference is by discussing the Mi’kmaq not as a uniform collective, but by examining community case studies across Nova Scotia, and in some cases outside the province, though still within Mi’kma’ki. This is not done to examine them in isolation for simplicity but, rather, to respect each community’s unique experiences and beliefs. This thesis strives to understand them in the paradigm of their own culture and mentalities as well as to build a foundation on which to assess Mi’kmaw-British relations within the framework of agricultural policies in the nineteenth century.

The historians that have influenced this thesis, and on whom in turn this thesis draws the most, are Atlantic Canadian scholars who emerged from the educational revolution of the 1960s. This 50-year-plus historiographical revolution is often referred to (sometimes with an intended dig,) as the Acadiensis School. In “Organizing Historical Memory in the Maritimes: A Reconnaissance,” Del Muiise, one of many prominent scholars featured in this school, casts an introspective eye on the connections between the personal and the political in this movement. First and foremost these scholars wished to define and explore the Atlantic Canadian region through the lense of emerging ideas on

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<sup>5</sup> Tosh, “Historical Awareness,” 8.

<sup>6</sup> Tosh, “Historical Awareness,” 6.

the nationalist (or lack thereof) origins of Canada, and in particular to challenge master narratives of post-Second World War Canadian scholarship that effectively marginalized the eastern region's history and value. As Muise stated:

Our initial objective was to compensate for the virtual absence of the Maritimes from national narratives — particularly for the post-Confederation era. Frank Underhill's rather casual remark that nothing much of consequence had happened here since 1867 stung a great many of us.<sup>7</sup>

The Acadensis School has greatly contributed to Post-Confederation Atlantic Canadian historiography, as well as Pre-Confederation. John G. Reid has especially bolstered colonial history regarding Indigenous peoples. The scholarship that has emerged from this initiative has revolutionized perspectives on the regional experience and has shaped the methodology this thesis uses, as well as forms the historiography it draws from and aspires to contribute towards.

This study will address hitherto unanswered questions in Atlantic Canadian history on the subject of Mi'kmaq-British relations in regards to agricultural policies in colonial Nova Scotia. Little has been written that directly speaks to this subject; however, there exists a body of historical analysis surrounding Indigenous people in Canada, and environmental history in Nova Scotia, from which this study can extrapolate and upon which it can build. Where there is no historical literature on this subject in the context of Atlantic Canada, this study will use western Canadian bodies of historical work to inform and structure neglected topics, with a heavy emphasis on primary sources, consisting mostly of petitions from Mi'kmaw communities to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly, mostly found at the Nova Scotia Archives, weaved into the narrative.

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<sup>7</sup> D.A. Muise, "Organizing Historical Memory in the Maritimes: A Reconnaissance," *Acadiensis*, XXX, 1 (Autumn 2000), 50.

One of the first scholarly works pertinent for the consideration of this study is John Bartlet Brebner's *The Neutral Yankees of Nova Scotia: A Marginal Colony During the Revolutionary Years*. This work was published in 1937 and is important as Brebner was one of the first who put forward the idea, that continues to be held by historians and others today, that the Indigenous populations of British North America were at the mercy of the British as a direct result of the military conquests of Louisbourg and Upper and Lower Canada.<sup>8</sup> He implied that Indigenous relations held little significance after these conquests on non-Indigenous settlement history in the Atlantic region. Although he argued this point, his work was not on an Indigenous topic. Rather, his research sought to examine why the colony of Nova Scotia did not participate in the American Revolution from 1765 to 1783. His thesis held that Nova Scotia's non-involvement in the American Revolution was partly due to the self-interests of Halifax merchants, but moreover because of the apathy of most Planters in the area as a result of their different imperial experiences that were cut off from mainstream American society. In his article, "'Pax Britannica or Pax Indigena?'" Planter Nova Scotia (1760-1782) and Competing Strategies of Pacification," John Reid addresses this and brings out nuances that Brebner's work does not – namely, that this argument positions a limited three-tier choice for Planters: to be either revolutionaries, Loyalists, or apathetic. Reid suggests the symmetry was absent, and this understanding of Planter history, and by extension, Mi'kmaq-British relations, is flawed.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See John Bartlet Brebner, *The Neutral Yankees of Nova Scotia: A Marginal Colony During the Revolutionary Years* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937).

<sup>9</sup> See John G. Reid, "'Pax Britannica or Pax Indigena?'" Planter Nova Scotia (1760-1782) and Competing Strategies of Pacification," *Canadian Historical Review* 85:4 (December 2004): 669-692.



Stephen Patterson's article "1744-1763: Colonial Wars and Aboriginal Peoples" follows Brebner's historiographical direction, although in a lighter manner.<sup>10</sup> Patterson argues that the British defeat of France in 1758 encouraged the political collapse of the Mi'kmaq population in Nova Scotia as a fighting force, and that because of this, the treaties of 1760-1 were created and signed in a context where the British saw the end of Indigenous-French relations and alliances as a vindication of their more aggressive "total war" approach towards Indigenous peoples. Although this project does not align with this argument, alternative views on Indigenous history, especially in relation to Mi'kmaq-British relations, are helpful in contextualizing all historiography on the subject.

The next pertinent study on which this thesis draws is Alfred Crosby's influential work, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*. Published in 1972, Crosby coined the term "The Columbian Exchange" and jumpstarted the fledgling field of environmental history.<sup>11</sup> He also situated contact/encounter as something more than a simple meeting of peoples from different continents – he positioned it as a watershed moment in history when biological entities (peoples, animals, pathogens, viruses, bacteria, food, and plants) were just as important as ideologies and military strategies in colonizing efforts. This work is important in contextualizing British agricultural policies as it helps situate their knowledge of seed potatoes and general farming practices outside of Great Britain as well as to shed light on all factors contributing to British agricultural policies in colonial Nova Scotia.

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<sup>10</sup> See Stephen E. Patterson, '1744-1763: Colonial Wars and Aboriginal Peoples,' in *The Atlantic Region to Confederation: A History*, eds. Buckner, Phillip A. and John G. Reid (Toronto and Fredericton: University of Toronto Press and Acadiensis Press, 1993).

<sup>11</sup> See Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing, 1972).

Richard Bartlett's *Indian Reserves in the Atlantic Provinces of Canada* provides an overview of Mi'kmaw communities in colonial Nova Scotia, as well as placing the experience of the Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia into a larger Atlantic Canadian narrative, in tandem with the experiences of the Wolastoqiyik and Beothuk in relation to land rights.<sup>12</sup> In other words, Bartlett does a good job of connecting the more limited histories of Mi'kmaki into a larger Atlantic Canadian regional trend. He approaches the topic with a legal background as he is a professor of Law at the College of Law, University of Saskatchewan, and has published extensively in the field of Indigenous law and land rights. The study's main objective is to identify and describe the legal and administrative nature of reserves in the Atlantic provinces and dealing with the question of who has a right to land. He concludes that the limited regard granted to Indigenous rights by the colonial government carried over to the federal government after Confederation. Although his study deals mostly with land rights post-Confederation, he traces the history of Indigenous land dispossession to contextualize the twentieth century situation. For example, he details how Nova Scotia was legally partitioned after the Loyalist migration. This migration consisted of American colonists, of diverse ethnic backgrounds, who supported the British cause during the American Revolution and subsequently moved to British colonies after America won the war. Unhappy with the colonial rule in Nova Scotia, they lobbied the British government in 1784 to divide Nova Scotia into three separate colonies; keeping Nova Scotia as one colony, with the mainland side of the Bay of Fundy becoming New Brunswick, and Cape Breton as a separate colony until it again

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<sup>12</sup> See Richard H. Bartlett, *Indian Reserves in the Atlantic Provinces of Canada* (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan Press, 1986).

became part of Nova Scotia in 1821. The capitals, respectively, were Halifax, Saint John, and Sydney.

Leading up to the partition, Bartlett claims it was already apparent that an influx of Loyalists from the War of the American Revolution would dispossess Indigenous people in the Atlantic Canadian region. As a result, in 1783 ten grants were made to Mi'kmaq groups in the form of licenses of occupation. The lands granted were located at St. Margaret's Bay, Sheet Harbour, St. David's Bay, and along the Stewiacke, Remsheg, Antigonish, Philip, Merigomish, Macan, and Shubenacadie rivers.<sup>13</sup> It is noteworthy that Bartlett claimed "[t]he Micmac did not settle and cultivate the lands which had been granted to them and subsequently they were subject to encroachment by white settlers."<sup>14</sup> This encapsulates the mentality that the right to land occurs through cultivation – some Mi'kmaq did not cultivate lands granted to them, and as a result when they reached out for legal help to regain their lands from squatters, colonial powers did little to tackle the issue. One reason for this was that the British thought that because no cultivation took place, there was no real claim to the land they inhabited. Keeping the encroaching settlers where they were might prove more beneficial than dispossessing them. As well, there was still the very real issue of a lack of human resources and funds to approach the large problem of encroachment systematically. When Cape Breton came under the administration of the Government of Nova Scotia, so too did the reserves that had been set apart there. These included: Eskasoni, Whycocomagh, Wagamatkook, Chapel Island, Malagawatch, and River Marguerite. In total, based on a survey done in 1842, commissioned by Joseph Howe, the first Indian Commissioner, lands set aside for

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<sup>13</sup> Bartlett, *Indian Reserves*, 9.

<sup>14</sup> Bartlett, *Indian Reserves*, 9.

Mi'kmaw people on mainland Nova Scotia and on Cape Breton amounted to about 22,050 acres.<sup>15</sup> Bartlett's study goes on to examine the large problem of squatters and encroachment that plagued these land grants, and subsequent dispute and litigation difficulties that followed after Confederation from this unresolved issue.

In the same vein of Crosby's *Columbian Exchange* providing a groundbreaking work that changed how scholars approached a historical process, Richard White's *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1600-1815* also established a new understanding in Indigenous studies. Using a metaphor whereby Indigenous people are a rock, European people are the sea, and history is a constant storm, White describes two outcomes have historiographically come to light from the scenario: either "the sea wears down and dissolves the rock, or the sea erodes the rock but cannot finally absorb its battered remnant, which endures."<sup>16</sup> Challenging this historical dichotomy, White suggests that the meeting of sea and continent creates as well as destroys; meaning something new could potentially come out of the relationship, rather than one primal force coming out as victor. His argument builds off this premise, and he calls this new emerging element the middle ground, where compromise and negotiations resulted in a new form of cultural pluralism. This reconceptualization of Indigenous-European relations also positions encounter not as an event but rather as a continual process, drawing out the nuances and complexities of human relations.

Whereas the exploration of Indigenous-European relations in the context of Atlantic Canada has seen numerous studies and much academic interest and scholarship, the environmental and agricultural aspect of these relations in Atlantic Canada has not.

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<sup>15</sup> Bartlett, *Indian Reserves*, 10-11.

<sup>16</sup> Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), xxv.

This thesis seeks to contribute to righting this historiographical imbalance. One way of doing this in regards to secondary sources and contextualization is by drawing on academic scholarship that has examined this component, in a western Canadian framework, as the imposition of agricultural practices has been well studied in that context. Helen Buckley's study, *From Wooden Ploughs to Welfare: Why Indian Policy Failed in the Prairie Provinces*, is a good starting point in doing so.<sup>17</sup> Although Buckley's timeline does not match perfectly with this study – it begins in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, after this thesis concludes temporally – it does offer environmental approaches and methodology useful in tackling research. Buckley focuses on the people of the western plains and forests who lost their lands to settlers in the 1870s. Since then, they have lived on parcels of reserve lands in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. This monograph looks at the history of Indigenous-European relations and discusses the various failures of the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) policies in the prairies. The DIA was the department of the federal government of Canada that held responsibility for policies relating to Indigenous groups in Canada. She traces the DIA policies failures back to a lack of creativity and a sense of paternalism within the department towards Indigenous peoples. However, she fails to attribute some of the DIA policy failures to federal-provincial jurisdictional power struggles and jealousies. As well, at various points she refers to Indigenous peoples as collectively defeated by these relations, a notion that this thesis counters. Overall, however, her approaches to DIA policies are helpful in regards to agricultural policies enacted in the Atlantic colonies and add to the context of

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<sup>17</sup> See Helen Buckley, *From Wooden Ploughs to Welfare: Why Indian Policy Failed in the Prairie Provinces* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992).

British policies in the nineteenth century. Buckley states that the Prairie provinces and the federal government have:

...a history laced with misunderstanding and shaped by bureaucrats. Government, in the early days, saw the problems in simple terms, with a keen eye for cost and low expectations. Many Canadians at that time believed that the former hunters would be unable to adapt and perhaps would not survive, for they had been much reduced by epidemics and starvation. The official plan, on the other hand, called for assimilation into Canadian society. The results, as they may be seen today, confound both extremes.<sup>18</sup>

This quotation illuminates a similar situation between the Mi'kmaq and the colonial British administration in Nova Scotia in the nineteenth century. The belief that Indigenous people were on the decline, and that their populations would gradually lower until eventual extinction, was common. Ralph Pastore outlines the historical reasons behind this belief in the Atlantic region in his article, "The Collapse of the Beothuk World." Many colonialists thought Indigenous peoples were going to become extinct. One reason for this mentality was the fresh case study of the Beothuk.<sup>19</sup> The Beothuk were Indigenous people in Newfoundland. They officially became "extinct" in 1829, when the last known Beothuk woman died of tuberculosis. The circumstances surrounding the Beothuk's extinction were unclear for decades. In 1915 James P. Howley published a collection of documents that concluded that they had been hunted and harassed into extinction on purpose. Later, James Tuck's archaeological investigations into sites in Newfoundland were published and it was determined that the Beothuk had depended on the resources of the sea for the majority of their sustenance. He argued that Europeans murdered the Beothuks. However, being denied access to the coast had a larger negative impact on their survival, caused by the Mi'kmaq pushing the Beothuks

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<sup>18</sup> Buckley, *From Wooden Ploughs to Welfare*, 6.

<sup>19</sup> See Ralph Pastore. "The Collapse of the Beothuk World." *Acadiensis*, XIX, 1 (Autumn 1989): 52-71.

into the inlands of Newfoundland an away from resources. They also had a disproportionate amount of predators compared to the prey species. Even though the variables and circumstances that led to the extinction of the Newfoundland Beothuks were not present in Nova Scotia, people still thought extinction was a strong possibility for the Mi'kmaq, with every present sickness. This impacted the manner in which the colonial government approached issues concerning Mi'kmaw people, and affected their long-term goals for Indigenous people in the nineteenth century.

On the same topic of declining health and Indigenous populations is Peter Twohig's article, "Colonial Care: Medical Attendance Among the Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia." This work illustrates the complex interaction between the colonial British government of Nova Scotia and its Indian Commissioners, the Mi'kmaw population, and an emerging medical community that struggled through shifting financial realities.<sup>20</sup> Twohig argues that the doctors tending to the Mi'kmaq across Nova Scotia, mostly in rural areas, came from an emerging medical elite and that their services were part of a broader and widespread reform effort. This work underscores the importance of the fledging colonial Indian administration, and touches on the reform efforts directed towards the Mi'kmaw population that sought agrarian policies. One discourse was that agricultural endeavors would help the ailing health of the Mi'kmaw population. This work informs this project as it offers insights into the dire financial situation of the colonial government in Nova Scotia, as well as on some of its organizational failures.

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<sup>20</sup> See Peter Twohig, "Colonial Care: Medical Attendance Among the Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia." *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 13, 2 (1996): 333-353.

Donaldson's article, "Making a Joyful Noise," offers an example of how to approach gender in Indigenous history.<sup>21</sup> Specifically, this work demonstrates the pluralism that took place in Indigenous communities as a source of cultural survival; Indigenous peoples would adopt customs when they were forced to for imperial relations, however, they would incorporate their own beliefs into the new system. Donaldson's "Cross women" is an example of this. When practicing Christianity, some Indigenous women decorated the Christian cross with traditional Indigenous decorations, such as porcupine needles, and practiced specific Indigenous religious beliefs while concurrently practicing Catholicism. This work adds context to Indigenous-French relations, but also to understanding Indigenous pluralism, which took place in colonial Nova Scotia as well, as the *Jesuit Relations* describe, and later on in the nineteenth century.

Wanhalla's article, "Women 'Living Across the Line': Intermarriage on the Canadian Prairies and in Southern New Zealand, 1870-1900," examines the gendered experiences of Indigenous women who married French fur traders.<sup>22</sup> Indigenous kinship networks are examined in a manner that demonstrates Indigenous agency over their own fate, instead of portraying them as passive historical figures, and examines Indigenous-French relations. In the middle ground, a concept borrowed from White's scholarship, Wanhalla contends that maternal kinship networks were sought after, and encouraged for a time by British and French governments for power and material goods. This study helps inform this project's introduction when discussing social relations with the Mi'kmaq and

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<sup>21</sup> See Laura E. Donaldson, "Making a Joyful Noise," *Interventions: International Journal of Post-Colonial Studies* 7:2 (2005): 180-198.

<sup>22</sup> See Angela Wanhalla, "Women 'Living Across the Line': Intermarriage on the Canadian Prairies and in Southern New Zealand, 1870-1900," *Ethnohistory* 55 1 (Winter 2008): 29-49.



French, as well as the power struggles between Imperial France and Britain in regards to eastern colonies.

There is an on-going academic debate on the extent to which the Mi'kmaq cultivated their lands before consistent European contact and colonization. In his article, "The Cultural Economy of Survival: The Mi'kmaq of Cape Breton in the Mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century," Andrew Parnaby states that agriculture was more than likely not present in Mi'kmaq pre-contact society. As there are not many sources a historian can examine from pre-contact Indigenous communities, it is difficult to determine with certainty the extent to which they cultivated their lands. One approach William Wicken takes in *Mi'kmaq Treaties on Trial: History, Land, and Donald Marshall Junior* in regards to the debate on the extent of Indigenous agricultural cultivation prior to British colonization is to examine a relatively early post-European contact period. Wicken addresses agricultural practices of the Mi'kmaq in the early 1700s. He states that Mi'kmaw communities were smaller and more mobile than, say, Iroquois communities. They grew corn in small garden plots but were more dependent on fishing and hunting as sources of nourishment — because of their dependence on fishing and hunting, they did not stay in one place for very long. They followed their food sources.<sup>23</sup> Wicken's examination of Mi'kmaw agricultural practices in the early 1700s is useful as it shows that the Mi'kmaq were not practicing agriculture on a subsistence level. It would appear that the corn had been supplementary to the fishing and hunting practices, which would have brought in the biggest source of sustenance. Regardless of the outcome of the debate regarding Mi'kmaw agricultural practices before European contact, it is clear that Mi'kmaw agricultural practices were

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<sup>23</sup> William C. Wicken, *Mi'kmaq Treaties on Trial: History, Land, and Donald Marshall Junior* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 30.

significantly increased after ongoing contact with Europeans, and as a result of agricultural policies implemented by the British in colonial Nova Scotia. Another scholar who contributed to this debate was William Cronon.

In *Changes in the Land, Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*, Cronon compared Indigenous and British agricultural practices.<sup>24</sup> He states that maize was the most important crop. Each year farmers began to work their fields around the same time—when the land thawed and the snow started to melt sometime in March. They also planted their crops around the same time—late March, April, and May. They fished, hunted, and gathered berries at similar times. Cronon points out that both British and Indigenous peoples were bound to cycles of seasons, and what really separated one from the other had less to do with plants and more to do with the use of animals (domesticated grazing animals) and tools, namely, the plow.

Although Parnaby and Wicken discuss this historiographical debate, their scholarly works do not focus at length on this topic. Rather, Parnaby discusses the Mi'kmaq in Cape Breton and how they used their culture as a weapon against settler colonialism, and British policies in general.<sup>25</sup> He also examines Mi'kmaw women specifically and how they participated in agricultural endeavours compounded by selling craft baskets to support themselves and their communities in harsh economic times. Moreover, Parnaby argues that when Mi'kmaq made baskets, dressed up for social occasions, sowed seeds, or filed petitions, they used their culture as a resource that helped shape new and hybrid patterns of life, thus ensuring their cultural survival. This fits into

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<sup>24</sup> See William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003).

<sup>25</sup> See Andrew Parnaby, "The Cultural Economy of Survival: The Mi'kmaq of Cape Breton in the Mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century," *Labour/Le Travail* 61 (2008): 69-98.

the larger discussion of Indigenous pluralism, introduced by works such as Crosby's and White's, and specifically into the narrative surrounding agricultural policies in Cape Breton during the mid-nineteenth century.

As well, Wicken's work examined the 1725-6 Treaty of Friendship and Peace between the British colonial government of Nova Scotia and local Mi'kmaq peoples. This treaty acknowledged the co-existence of the Mi'kmaq with British law and stemmed from a complex history of negotiation based on Indigenous-European relations prior to the treaty. Wicken argues that after 1749, a more aggressive British military presence promoted the re-interpretation of this treaty in the light of British political interests. Throughout this discussion Wicken brings the focus of this treaty towards the twentieth century in relation to the Donald Marshall case to demonstrate how inter-cultural and power relationships of the past have shaped laws as well as social relations of the present. This work is important for this project for its discussion of the Treaty of Friendship and Peace, and in Wicken's assertion that treaties must be viewed in their historical context and concurrently with oral traditions of Mi'kmaq people to be properly understood.

The theoretical framework this project has been designed to use as a lens in approaching evidence is settler colonialism. It is a form of colonial formation where a foreign imperial power moves into a space with an Indigenous population. This imperial power then encourages settlers to also come to this space, whereby they consent to be governed by said imperial power. The subsequent step is that the settlers then develop their own regimes, still nominally within the empire, but informed by the interest and priorities of the settlers themselves. Land is the key resource in settler colonies, which differentiates settler colonialism from other forms of colonialism whereby natural and human resources are the main motivations. As well, unlike other forms of colonialism,

settler colonialism can last indefinitely. This project uses the work of Patrick Wolfe, Lorenzo Veracini, and, Annie E. Coombes in discussing and applying the framework of settler colonialism onto Mi'kmaq-British relations in colonial Nova Scotia. The term framework is crucial, as this work is not meant to be considered a contribution to settler colonial studies. Rather, it borrows and utilizes tools that the field of settler colonial studies have made available, in order to better interpret, analyze, and convey Indigenous history in Atlantic Canada.<sup>26</sup> As John G. Reid has stated, "...any proper understanding of the Atlantic world, as it embraced North America, must be based on considering the interaction of Aboriginal, imperial, and (if appropriate) colonial dimensions of the human experience in any given time."<sup>27</sup> The settler colonial framework allows for an effective examination and discussion of these variables at play within British agricultural policies aimed at the Mi'kmaq in colonial Nova Scotia in the nineteenth century.

Wolfe's *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* was groundbreaking for settler colonialism as Wolfe argued that it was not a master-servant relationship marked by ethnic differences. Rather, he emphasized the dispensability of the Indigenous person in a settler colonial context.<sup>28</sup> He put forward the idea that invasion is a structure, not an event. This often-cited principle runs deep for the importance of settler colonialism as a framework and field of study, because, as J. Kēhaulani Kauanui has explained,

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<sup>26</sup> As J. Kēhaulani Kauanui wrote, "Settler Colonial Studies does not, should not, and cannot replace Indigenous Studies." See "'A Structure, Not an Event': Settler Colonialism and Enduring Indigeneity" *Lateral Journal of the Cultural Studies Association* 5.1 (Spring 2016): <http://csalateral.org/wp/issue/5-1/forum-alt-humanities-settler-colonialism-enduring-indigeneity-kauanui/>

<sup>27</sup> "How Wide Is the Atlantic Ocean? Not Wide Enough!", *Acadiensis*, XXXIV, 2 (Spring 2005): 86.

<sup>28</sup> See Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (New York: Cassell, 1998).

Understanding settler colonialism as a structure exposes the fact that colonialism cannot be relegated to the past, even though the past-present should be historicized. The notion that colonialism is something that ends ... has its counterpart narrative in the myth that indigenous peoples ended when colonialism ended.<sup>29</sup>

Wolfe's work is viewed as a pivotal work in settler colonialism as it more or less extracted this theory from colonial and postcolonial scholarly work, and made settler colonialism a distinct academic field of its own. As well, Wolfe is credited with stipulating that settler colonialism destroys to replace populations.

Kauanui offers a reappraisal of settler colonialism, particularly in regard to Wolfe's work, offering Alyosha Goldstein's criticism that Wolfe's work, and his statement that "invasion is a structure, not an event" tends to produce a binary of settler-Indigenous.<sup>30</sup> This thesis complicates this potential binary by pointing to the fluid roles that settlers played. They engaged in a type of settler colonialism by aiding the colonial government with surveillance and policy enforcement – as Indian agents, and less formally through petitioning the government as concerned British subjects with their neighbours. Even more insidious, however, was the settlers' engagement with the land through general settlement: taking land, encroaching, fishing, farming, building. This all affected the Mi'kmaq and how they interacted with settlers, the government, the environment, and even with each other. This study further complicates the binary of settler-Mi'kmaq, however, by also including petitions that settlers wrote on behalf of Mi'kmaw communities or individuals. Translating and organizing petitions to assist the

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<sup>29</sup> J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, "A Structure, Not an Event," <http://csalateral.org/wp/issue/5-1/forum-alt-humanities-settler-colonialism-enduring-indigeneity-kauanui/>

<sup>30</sup> Goldstein's criticism arose at a panel during the 2015 annual meeting of the American Studies Association (ASA) in his presentation "The Settler Colonialism Analytic: A Critical Reappraisal." J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, "A Structure, Not an Event," <http://csalateral.org/wp/issue/5-1/forum-alt-humanities-settler-colonialism-enduring-indigeneity-kauanui/>

Mi'kmaq demonstrates one manner in which settlers held a fluid role when it came to Mi'kmaq-British relations – and, for that matter, settler relations as well – in Nova Scotia.

Veracini's *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* is a theoretical reflection on settler colonialism as being distinct from colonialism and is important in the growing literature on this field.<sup>31</sup> Veracini positions settlers as founders of political orders, and that settler colonialism operated autonomously in the context of a developing colonial discourse and among developing practices. This book also describes in detail the historiography of settler colonialism as a field and a way to approach Canadian history. It emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s. One important point Veracini makes is that there are intrinsic risks in focusing primarily on Indigenous peoples and their experience in history, and that projects need to focus on settlers as well in order to avoid the possibility of viewing the settler as the normative trend in history, and thus Indigenous peoples as the other in a colonized gaze. This project has been therefore designed to examine both settlers and Indigenous peoples in colonial Nova Scotia.

Coombes's *Rethinking Settler Colonialism: History and Memory in Australia, Canada, Aotearora New Zealand, and South Africa* places settler colonialism not in the past, but in a temporally fluid light.<sup>32</sup> The various essays and the artwork in this book insist that an understanding of the political institutions and practices that shaped settler colonial societies in the past can reinforce unequal rights that are still being contested in the present. This work also addresses previously-held ideas concerning myths, narratives, and public culture in colonial settler societies that inform this project, especially in

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<sup>31</sup> See Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

<sup>32</sup> See Annie E. Coombes, *Rethinking Settler Colonialism: History and Memory in Australia, Canada, Aotearora New Zealand, and South Africa* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

regards to its conclusion with how settler colonialism affected disputes over land leading up to confederation (and afterwards) in Nova Scotia.

In discussing settler colonialism, a work that indirectly widens this perspective is Denys Delâge's *Bitter Feast: Amerindians and Europeans in Northeastern North America, 1600-64*. This English translation of Delâge's monograph analyzes European colonialism of North America in the seventeenth century.<sup>33</sup> This includes an overview of French, Dutch, and British imperial powers. He approaches this in a world-system theory, largely by examining how these social groups transitioned from colonies to a capitalist system. He also examines Indigenous communities across North America and how their societies were affected by this gradual transition towards capitalism. Although this work is not overly convincing in its approach to colonial history in North America as a linear transition towards a European economic world system, his examinations are helpful through a settler colonialism reading, especially in regards to land disputes and resource exploitation in the Atlantic colonies. His discussion in that regard helps contextualize this project.

Fingard's article, "English Humanitarianism and the Colonial Mind: Walter Bromley in Nova Scotia, 1813-1825," informs this project through a biographical approach to Walter Bromley.<sup>34</sup> Bromley held that the Mi'kmaq's poor living conditions could be solved the same way the problem of the urban poor could; if they had suitable employment, they would stop going to urban centers trying to find subsistence. In Bromley's day Indigenous agrarian communities were still the most popular basis for

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<sup>33</sup> See Denys Delâge, *Bitter Feast: Amerindians and Europeans in Northeastern North America, 1600-64* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1993).

<sup>34</sup> See Judith Fingard, "English Humanitarianism and the Colonial Mind: Walter Bromley in Nova Scotia, 1813-1825," *Canadian Historical Review* 54 (1973): 123-51.

employment as settlement was viewed as the first essential step on the road to “civilization.” This goes along with Locke’s theory on private property. One aspect of Fingard’s work that is overlooked in other studies of government policies in colonial Nova Scotia is how one personality could attract aid from private sources. Bromley’s campaign of interest in his Indigenous projects attracted the moral and financial support from Quakers from the American seaboard. In this regard, it is important because the historical myth that Indigenous peoples were wholly dependent on the government for financial stability after colonization is inaccurate.

Haigh’s article ““They Must Cultivate the Land’: Abraham Gesner as Indian Commissioner, 1847-1853,” details Abraham Gesner’s time as an Indian Commissioner.<sup>35</sup> He was an important advocate for agricultural policy targeting Mi’kmaq people. In 1847 he was appointed Indian Commissioner for Colchester, Hants, Kings, and Lunenburg counties. He did not receive a salary for his position, which was standard for Indian Commissioners before Confederation. He was not a good farmer, although it appears that he was genuinely sympathetic to the Mi’kmaq. He understood his position as Indian Commissioner was to integrate Mi’kmaq peoples into “white society” and to settle them on reserves appointed to them as farmers. Part of his duties involved travelling around southern Nova Scotia, taking censuses of Mi’kmaq communities, treating illnesses if possible, and distributing seed potatoes and grain. As encouragement for good agricultural practices, on his trips he offered small bounties on the best crops and best fences. He noted that in Halifax, Cumberland, and Hants counties potato and wheat crops failed almost completely. Even with this large defeat, he managed to convince some

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<sup>35</sup> See Elizabeth Haigh, “They Must Cultivate the Land: Abraham Gesner as Indian Commissioner, 1847-1853,” *Journal of the Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society* 3 (2000): 54-70.



Mi'kmaq to remain on reserve and to continue to farm, as well as persuading new Mi'kmaw families to begin farming. He was a firm believer that only settlement and land cultivation could save them. As well as offer biographical work on Gesner, Haigh's piece also offers a summary of the history of Indian Commissioners in Nova Scotia, dating back to the first, George Henry Monk, in 1783.

This thesis will be organized into five chapters. The first and last are the introduction and the conclusion. The second chapter, "Theory and Practice in Indigenous Civilization," contextualizes the political and imperial conditions present in Nova Scotia during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, with regard to the Mi'kmaq, colonial settlers, and imperial powers, and examines the theoretical frameworks that served as mental buttresses for the British in implementing agricultural policies directed at the Mi'kmaq. It also underlines their various motivations for doing so and argues that John Locke's theory of property helped to self-justify British colonial actions taken against the Mi'kmaq that was part of a larger complicated and developing process of dispossession and settler colonization in Eastern British North America. The third chapter, "The Precursor to Agricultural Policies: Relief Policies and Funds," argues against the notion that the British had no reason to fear the Mi'kmaq as potential threats after the influx of Loyalists from 1782-1784. Rather, it argues that the British continued to fear and distrust the Mi'kmaw peoples' loyalty, and in times of war (or threats thereof), this fear was responsible for surges and waves of relief policies and funds to win over the Mi'kmaq. It also situates the relief funds and policies historically with gift-giving, and delves into the war of 1812 as a major factor in the British colonial government's shift from relief funds to agricultural policies. The fourth chapter, "The Rise and Fall of Agricultural Policies," argues that Chief Pemmeenauweet's petition to Queen Victoria was the catalyst for the

serious implementation of agricultural policies. Accordingly, it examines these policies and the disease, potato blight, that ravaged Nova Scotia from 1846 to 1848 and effectively made a mockery of the rhetoric the British employed while enforcing farming as the solution to all of the Mi'kmaq's problems. It concludes that the government fell back on old habits and again used relief policies until Confederation when responsibility shifted from the provincial government to the new federal government.

Thus, this thesis examines Mi'kmaq-British relations from the late eighteenth century to the late nineteenth century and follows the development of agricultural policies from their foundational roots to their serious implementation. Their roots for the Mi'kmaq grew from their imperial relationship with British officials in the form of gift-giving and friendship, and a sense of (rightful) entitlement for governmental aid when needed. For the British colonial government, roots for the agricultural policies grew from fears that the Mi'kmaq posed a threat in times of war or potential multiple hostilities, as well as from the historical British imperial relationship with the Mi'kmaq and Nova Scotia relief policies. The British agricultural policies were pushed in the hopes that the Mi'kmaq would become stationary instead of transient, and ultimately be "civilized." Although the Mi'kmaq never became the agriculturalists the British envisioned, they did participate in sporadic farming activities and used the active British legal system to petition the government for various aids and rights. This thesis argues that although the agricultural policies the British hoped would "civilize" the Mi'kmaq fell short of their intended outcome, Mi'kmaq communities negotiated their pressures and possibilities, managing to use agricultural opportunities to alleviate difficult social and economic circumstances.

**Chapter Two:**  
**Theory and Practice in Indigenous ‘Civilization’**

“Dispossession takes many different and cumulative forms. It can be of land and landscape, of distinctive ways of seeing and using the environment and animals, of language, culture, family, lifestyles, identities, as well as gender and generational relationships. Often these are achieved not just by conquest and seizure, by military and economic means, but also by religion, education, and supposed social improvement, all perpetrated in the name of ‘civilisation’ and ‘progress.’”<sup>1</sup>

Indigenous-European relations changed profoundly in British North America from the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century. In both the Maritime Provinces and central regions peace was followed by substantial immigration, including the Loyalist migration from 1782-1784, and other British-sponsored immigrations. Most of this influx settled in Nova Scotia as well as in the region west of the Ottawa River, although others entered Quebec. On top of the influx of settlers, two other large factors were responsible for general changes in relations between Indigenous people and Europeans: the end of the Montreal-based fur trade, and the normalization of relations between the new United States and Great Britain. The lessening of the American menace, the presence of greatly increased numbers of Anglo-American and British settlers, and the termination of the Montreal-based fur trade changed the British government in Nova Scotia’s approach to its relationship with the Indigenous population. The association was no longer one that emphasized military alliance, but one in which the population of settlers was surpassing the Indigenous population.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Coombes, *Rethinking Settler Colonialism*, xii.

<sup>2</sup> See J.R. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: a History of Indian-White Relations* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000) for a discussion on the changing factors in Indigenous-European relations during this time, in his chapter 5: “From Alliance to ‘Irrelevance,’” 101-124.

Patrick Wolfe defined settler colonialism as:

at base a winner-take-all project whose dominant feature is not exploitation but replacement. The logic of this project, a sustained institutional tendency to eliminate the Indigenous population, informs a range of historical practices that might otherwise appear distinct— invasion is a structure not an event.<sup>3</sup>

Settler colonialism manifested itself in Nova Scotia relatively late compared to elsewhere in British North America. Although it had a continuous British imperial presence from 1710 onwards, British settlement on a large scale was sparse. The British had a presence at Annapolis Royal in the south, and an intermittent one at Canso towards the north; outside of these settlements, other colonial settlements in Nova Scotian were largely Acadian, especially surrounding the Bay of Fundy. Later, the establishment of Halifax in 1749, Dartmouth in 1750, and Lunenburg in 1752 only added a few thousand settlers to the existing non-Indigenous population. The *Grand dérangement* of 1755-1762 displaced and destroyed the Acadian communities (although did not end the strong Acadian culture and presence elsewhere). The 1760s saw the migration of New England Planters and other settlers; however they mostly replaced the lost Acadian populations and settled in the lands that were previously home to the Acadians. This is all to say that colonial settlement before the Loyalist migration was largely peripheral to the inland areas of Nova Scotia, which was Mi'kmaq territory.<sup>4</sup> As a result of these geopolitics, British imperial influence was only exerted in small pockets across the colony, with limitations. Afterward the Loyalist migration, however, the 30,000 new settlers complicated this

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<sup>3</sup> Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*, 163.

<sup>4</sup> As noted, colonial Nova Scotia was a portion of Mi'kma'ki – the Mi'kmaq territory. More Specifically, this included Kespek (Last Land) and Sikniki (Drainage Area) in what is now New Brunswick, Epexiwirk (Lying in the Water) in what is now Prince Edward Island, and Unama'kik (Land of Fog) for Cape Breton. The modern boundaries of Nova Scotia include Agg Piktuk (The Explosive Place) near Canso, Eskikwea'kik (Skin Dressers Territory) along the southern eastern side to Halifax, Sipekne'katik (Wild Potato Area) in what is now called the Annapolis Valley, and Kespukwitk (Land Ends) in today's southern shore.

system and aided in shifting existing Indigenous-British relations. In this new context, relations were less mutually determined than before. As Wolfe's definition holds, the relationship shifted to depend on the new dispensability of Indigenous persons in the emerging and developing settler colonial context.

As immigrant settlers moved into the Maritime colonies, a pattern of dispossession emerged. The new settlers dispossessed original Mi'kmaw inhabitants, despite government pledges to respect the small amount of land allotted and set aside for Indigenous people. Squatters encroached on Mi'kmaw land, "improved" their property with a British conception of buildings and agricultural developments, and resisted the feeble efforts made to make them leave. As petitions from the Nova Scotia House of Assembly from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries demonstrate, it was a widespread issue. These issues gave rise to conflicts between the Mi'kmaq and newcomers. Charles McNab noted in a land petition in Margaree, Cape Breton: "the Indians have been giving trouble to the new settlers," when the immigrants established farms and mills, and sought access to spawning fish.<sup>5</sup> The consequence of this pattern of Indigenous-settler relations, one of encroachment on land by the latter on the former, was Mi'kmaq dispossession compounded by an ever-present social, as well as an increasing economic, pressure to become farmers. This pressure is articulated well in a petition to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly signed by the "Chiefs and Captains of the Micmac Indians" [see Figure 2] in 1849:

You have put ships and steamboats upon the water and they scare away the fish...You have made dams across the rivers, so that salmon cannot go up, and your laws will not let us spear them. As our game and fish are nearly gone and we

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<sup>5</sup> NSA, Land Petitions, Cape Breton Island, 1787–1843, Number 854, Petition from Charles McNab, 1812; Number 624, Petition from "Margaree Inhabitants," 1810.

cannot sell the articles we make, we have resolved to make farms.<sup>6</sup>

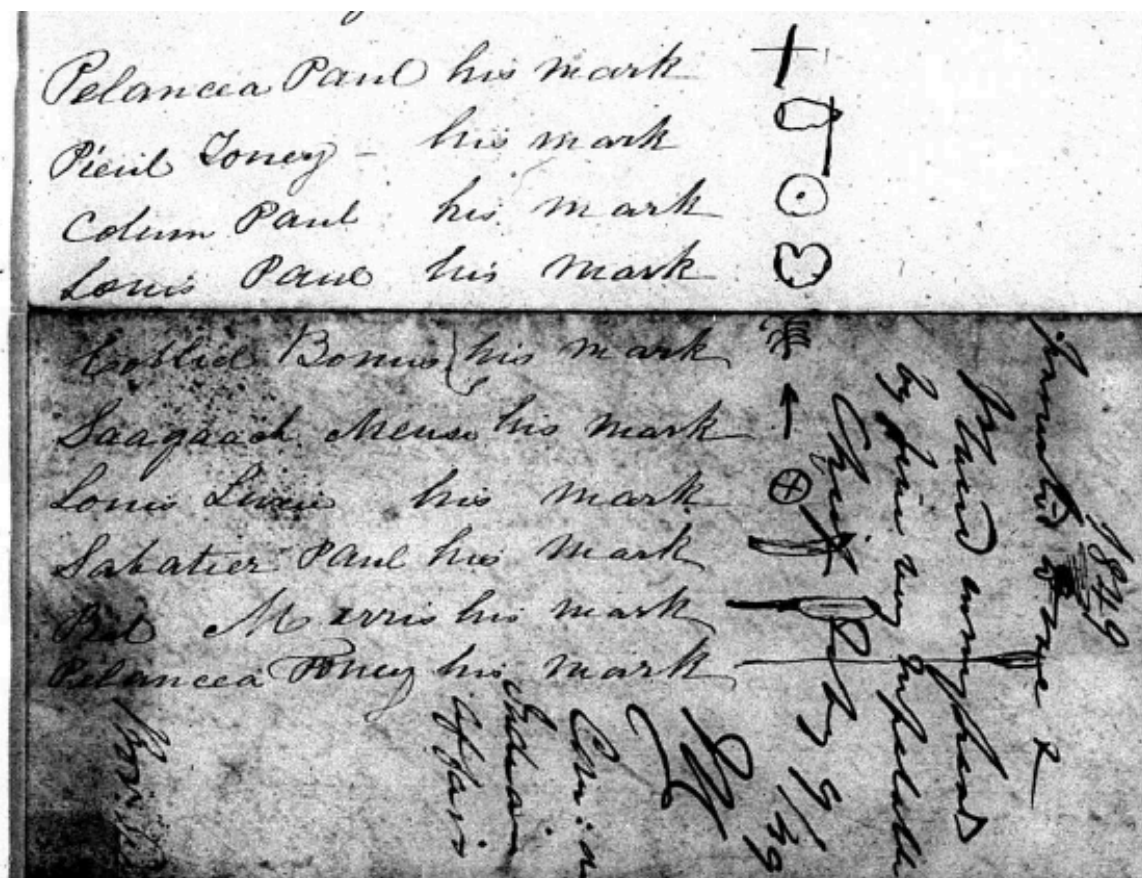


Figure 2: The signatures of the Mi'kmaq petitioning for aid to make a farm. NSA, RG5, Series P, Volume 45, Number 162. Petition of the “Chiefs and Captains of the Micmac Indians of Nova Scotia for aid to make farms,” 1849.

The new settlers who did encroach on Mi'kmaw land and territory would often build homes and make various other ‘improvements’ on the land. That this would often be their first task was, of course, a matter of practical survival. And yet, it also tapped into a deeper British cultural current that went hand-in-hand with ideologies concerning the origins of private property and what constituted ownership. These same concepts self-justified British colonial and imperial actions against the Mi'kmaq in regard to land dispossession and agricultural policies meant to assimilate Indigenous people into non-

<sup>6</sup> NSA, RG5, Series P, Volume 45, Number 162. Petition of the “Chiefs and Captains of the Micmac Indians of Nova Scotia for aid to make farms,” 1849.

Indigenous settler society. As Patricia Seed noted on the topic:

Englishmen usually constructed their right to occupy the New World on far more historically and culturally familiar grounds: building houses and fences and planting gardens...building the first house was critical to the initial stages of English settlement in the first place because of their cultural significance as registers of stability, historically carrying a significance of permanence missing even elsewhere in continental Europe.<sup>7</sup>

Besides improvements offering a historical and cultural precedent, they also established a legal right to the land they were constructed on in a British context. By erecting a fixed dwelling on land, under English law it created an unassailable right to ownership of that land. This was uniquely characteristic of English law; other European legal systems that developed in British North America required formal written records or ceremonies of permission to acquire or provide titles, even to (perceived) unoccupied or unused land. English law did not require ceremonies or documents, instead, improvements such as building houses, fences, or planting gardens created the right of possession. The continuing presence of those improvements maintained the fashioned ownership.<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to note the distinctions the English language developed surrounding the words wild and cultivated, in this context. Seed established that as early as the eighth century, Old English defined *Wild* as everything unrestrained; people, feelings, animals, and plants. *Cultivated* acted as *Wild*'s antonym, referring to its domesticated versions: "The pair of terms *wild/cultivated* thus signified a critical difference between savage (uncontrolled) and civilized."<sup>9</sup> Under this British ownership mentality, agricultural activities signified possession and permanence, which was exactly what the colonial British government in Nova Scotia wanted to foster among the Mi'kmaq. It was hoped

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<sup>7</sup> Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 17-18.

<sup>8</sup> Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession*, 18-19.

<sup>9</sup> Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession*, 28.



that through agricultural endeavours the Mi'kmaq would end their transient ways and be civilized into settler society (with limitations). Continuing in this vein, John Locke's writings offered ideological fuel for the British to use to fire up the policies and initiatives.

The crux of Locke's philosophy on land and property, which influenced British notions of property and agriculture in British North America, was that all land was by default collectively owned — private ownership of land was only secured through labour. Locke made this claim by arguing that God gave the world (and all its land) to Adam and his sons.<sup>10</sup> He clarified that this made all land in its natural state collectively owned by human beings, as descendants of Adam. The ideological foundation of achieving private property in nature was that an individual's labour was his or her own property. When individuals mixed their labour with nature to create something new, that product was also their property—no one else hereafter would have a right to it.<sup>11</sup> The most effective form of labour one could execute in nature was land cultivation: “As much land as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates, and can use the product of, so much is his property.”<sup>12</sup> When an individual built a fence with their own hands, or in the case of most elite Europeans, when they paid someone to build their fence, that fence and the land within it came to belong to that individual. Using this ideology of labour and property, settlements were built quickly and towns created, and in turn those settlements and towns fostered new societies. These evolutions of land to rural and then urban centers were, to Europeans, indications of civilization and progress, as Locke pointed out:

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<sup>10</sup> John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, 16.

<sup>11</sup> John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, 17.

<sup>12</sup> John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, 20.

It is labor indeed that put the difference of value on everything; and let anyone consider what the difference is between an acre of land planted with tobacco or sugar, sown with wheat or barley, and an acre of the same land lying in common without any husbandry upon it, and he will find that the improvement of labor makes the far greater part of the value.<sup>13</sup>

Beginning in the early eighteenth century, British colonizers in Nova Scotia sought to reform Mi'kmaq people's concepts and utilization of land through various agricultural policies, informed and influenced by Locke's theory of property. They hoped that in doing so, the Mi'kmaq and other peoples would become stationary instead of transient, and, ultimately, gradually be 'civilized' at their own cost and effort.

Locke referred directly to Indigenous people in his section on property in *Two Treatises*, saying: "There cannot be a clearer demonstration of anything than several nations of the Americans are of this, who are rich in land and poor in all the comforts of life."<sup>14</sup> This passage outlines a widespread European perception concerning Indigenous peoples' use of land—their lands were not being used effectively, or, they were not being used at all and were wasted on Indigenous people. Europeans (the British in particular) reasoned that Indigenous land was not being used to its fullest potential in regard to cultivation and labour, therefore Indigenous inhabitants should be relocated and their lands given to individuals with better agricultural practices – namely, themselves.<sup>15</sup>

This ideology found fertile ground in British North America. Settlers viewed houses, fields, and fences as tangible markers of occupation and ownership.<sup>16</sup> This ownership was acquired by action rather than by word, and created an indicator of

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<sup>13</sup> John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, 24.

<sup>14</sup> John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, 25.

<sup>15</sup> Parnaby, "The Cultural Economy of Survival," 76.

<sup>16</sup> For a more detailed and in-depth analysis of this, see Seed's chapter "Houses, Gardens, and Fences: Signs of English Possession in the New World" in *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 16-40.

possession on the landscape.<sup>17</sup> By the mid-eighteenth century the practice of this ideology had become inseparable from the growth of large non-Indigenous populations in parts of northeastern British North America that were partly urbanized.<sup>18</sup> European-populated areas, such as Massachusetts and New York, drew both on immigration and on the growth rate of the colonial population, which was fifteen times greater than in Europe. This was because of “free access to land, higher agricultural yields from virgin soil, availability of land already cleared by the Amerindians, high wages...and rich hunting and fishing resources.”<sup>19</sup> This colonial pattern of environmental and settler economic expansion was effective in solidifying a colonial grip in British North America, and colonial Nova Scotia also followed this pattern. This form of expansion consequently created a demand for more settler land, which was occupied by Indigenous people: “...capitalist agriculture...was primary, and persistent immigration of agricultural labour was essential to economic prosperity. The result was an inexorable demand for new agricultural land...that had to be expropriated from its aboriginal owners.”<sup>20</sup> The British ideology of labour and property came into direct contact with the colonists’ immediate self-interest in acquiring more land that produced a strong motivation for attaining further property in the colonies.

One specific example of a space the British took over in the desire to be more firmly rooted in Nova Scotia was the founding of Halifax in 1749. It was the first serious attempt, outside of the enclave at Annapolis Royal, to colonize lands acquired through the

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<sup>17</sup> Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (Toronto: University of British Columbia Press, 2002), 48.

<sup>18</sup> Reid, “*Pax Britannica or Pax Indigena?*” 675.

<sup>19</sup> Delâge, *Bitter Feast*, 253.

<sup>20</sup> Daniel Richter “Native Peoples of North American and the Eighteenth-Century British Empire” in *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume 11, The Eighteenth Century*, (1998): 348.

Treaty of Utrecht signed in 1713 and 1714, and it acted as a counter to the threat of the French in Louisbourg. The founding of Halifax is commonly held to be a turning point in Atlantic and Maritime history when the British showed a new determination to control Nova Scotia.<sup>21</sup> Halifax was founded in the Chebucto Peninsula area, a region the Mi'kmaq seasonally used. They were displaced while the area was being developed for the British colony. The Mi'kmaq people were not passive when it came to relocating, though. Their resistance to the British at Halifax actually caused Britain to reconsider and change previous settlement plans. George Dunk, Cornwallis's sponsor and second earl of Halifax, originally wanted five British military settlements in Nova Scotia. Cornwallis downsized after the Mi'kmaq protests, however, and only established the one, Halifax. He argued that it was better to be compact rather than spread out in case the danger posed by the Mi'kmaq were to manifest itself.<sup>22</sup>

That danger became evident a number of times, particularly with the episode that became known to settlers as the Dartmouth Massacre. The *Alderney* was a small three-masted barque that carried 370 passengers on board. This vessel set sail for Halifax around June 12<sup>th</sup>, 1750 with new British settlers for the colony. Due to poor weather conditions, it arrived late to the Halifax harbour sometime in late August or early September. Although all of the passengers were in surprisingly good health, thanks to the newly installed ventilation system on board, Governor Cornwallis was upset at the lateness of the ship. This was because the settlers had missed the window of opportunity to plant crops. Arrangements had to be made with local merchants and farmers to supply

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<sup>21</sup> Margaret R. Conrad and James K. Hiller. "Renegotiating the Atlantic Region, 1713-63," in *Atlantic Canada: A History* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2010): 77.

<sup>22</sup> Lennox, Jeffers. "An Empire on Paper: The Founding of Halifax and Conceptions of Imperial Space" in *Interpreting Canada's Past: A Pre-Confederation Reader*, (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2011), 149.

them with enough food to get through the first year. Various locations were considered for the new settlers, however it was decided the harbour across from Halifax would be an ideal place. Dartmouth was founded in 1750 with the new settlers in mind.<sup>23</sup> However, this area had long been used as seasonal Mi'kmaw grounds. The Mi'kmaq resented the English settlers and their invasion on their land, and decided to take a military stance.

A group of Mi'kmaq men assembled near the Minas Basin and used the Shubenacadie River to travel to Dartmouth in canoes, down through the chain of lakes to the fire lake adjacent the colony. On May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1751 in the middle of the night, the Mi'kmaq attacked the new settlement. Dartmouth had a blockhouse on Blackburn Hill with Captain William Clapham's rangers and British regulars from the 45<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot. Clapham and others stayed in the blockhouse and fired through loopholes at the Mi'kmaq but defended poorly. The Mi'kmaq did the most damage that day, with several British settlers and soldiers killed, and some taken prisoner.<sup>24</sup>

Governor Cornwallis reported on the incidents in a letter to the Board of Trade and Lords of Plantations on June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1751:

A large party of Indians came down to the small village opposite Halifax, where I was obliged to put some settlers when they arrived last year, in the night and did some mischief by killing the inhabitants. I think four and took six soldiers, who were not on guard. Our people killed six of the Indians and had they done their duty well might have killed more.<sup>25</sup>

Written accounts differ on the numbers of killed and injured. Governor Cornwallis stated in his incident report that four were killed and six were taken prisoner, while John Salusbury wrote in his journal:

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<sup>23</sup> Harry Chapman, *In the Wake of the Alderney: Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, 1750-2000* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 2001): 25-26.

<sup>24</sup> Chapman, *In the Wake of the Alderney*, 26-29.

<sup>25</sup> Governor Cornwallis to the Board of Trade and Lords of Plantations, June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1751. RG1, NSA, *Minutes of Executive Council, 1749-1753*, Vol. 186.

May 13<sup>th</sup>. Dartmouth Attacked by a Large party of Indians and do much mischief. Near twenty Kill'd and taken Men women and Children. Our Soldiery are constantly drunk there, neglect their Guards or this would not have happened, for we have fourscore men in Governments pay there. When they did turn out they value themselves that they drove the Indians—but the Indians went of, as they always do on those occasions. One or two Indians said to be Killed but we find none of them. A Sergeant at one of the Block Houses there let the Indians pass Him and His Men drawn up without firing a Shot, saying His Orders were to defend the Block House. Now if the Block-House had been empty, Indians would never cram themselves into such a post, and this our regulars often mistake sticking to the flanders discipline.<sup>26</sup>

Salisbury puts the death toll at around twenty. One possible reason for this discrepancy is the inquiry that was made into the actions of the soldiers who were guarding the colony that day. An article in the *London* magazine in May, 1751 stated: “a general court martial was ordered to enquire into the conduct of the officers and noncommissioned officers who suffered the village of Dartmouth to be plundered and many of the inhabitants put to death when there was a detachment of regulars and irregulars posted there for their protection to the amount upwards of 60 men.”<sup>27</sup> As a result of this inquiry, written numbers on the death toll may have been exaggerated or diminished depending on individual agendas regarding the military; Cornwallis would want to protect the soldiers and settlements, whereas Salisbury mentions how the soldiers were often inebriated and cowardly with their lives. Regardless, the Mi'kmaq made a strong military stance for their land that day that caused many settlers to leave Dartmouth. It was not until twenty-seven Nantucket Quaker families voyaged to Dartmouth in 1786 to settle there and conduct their whaling business in the British colony that a substantial immigration wave arrived in Dartmouth, partly due to the still prevalent fear of the Mi'kmaq threat.

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<sup>26</sup> John Salisbury, *Expeditions of Honour: The Journal of John Salisbury in Halifax, Nova Scotia*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011): 111.

<sup>27</sup> *London Magazine*, Vol. 20, 1751, p. 341.

Evident through the example of the Dartmouth raid, not only did the British colonial government ideologically deem Indigenous land-use ineffective, and their claim to land therefore null and void, but colonial officials also had settlers to keep in mind. The 1782-84 immigration wave of Loyalists, which saw 30,000 some new settlers, on top of Planter and Scottish settler waves, created mounting land pressures. The crucial significance of these immigration waves was the creation of conditions in which British perceptions of Indigenous ‘wandering’ became an actual and potentially lethal threat to new settlers and their land use in Nova Scotia. This perceived threat provided ample motivation to get the land situation under control; one avenue by which this was hoped to be addressed was through subsistence farming agriculture. As early as 1783 the colonial government pronounced its desire to make the Mi’kmaq end their pattern of gathering and hunting and to instead become sedentary farmers, who would cultivate the land through labour.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, agriculture became “a tool of the empire” against Indigenous ways of life.<sup>29</sup> A marker of British preoccupation with the Mi’kmaq way of life and habits is expressed in a 1841 census on the Mi’kmaq in Cape Breton, Richmond County: “In their active habits the most part may be considered migratory that is to say after planting their few potatoes they wander about the Island.”<sup>30</sup> This census, commissioned by Joseph Howe, was sent across the province, with the hope that Indian agents would fill out the paperwork on every Mi’kmaq community and in that way, the colonial government would be better informed on statistics and progress, or lack thereof.

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<sup>28</sup> Parnaby, “The Cultural Economy of Survival,” 75.

<sup>29</sup> Reid, “*Pax Britannica or Pax Indigena?*”, 675.

<sup>30</sup> Rupert D. George to George Edward Jean, Halifax June 28, 1841, “An account of the Indians living within the County of Richmond as taken on the 26<sup>th</sup> July 1841 – at the Indian Chapel Bras d’or Lake being the Anniversary of St. Ann’s day.” NSA, Record Group 5, Series P, Volume 8A, Number 14A and 14B.

Indeed, A.W. Barres, a priest, noted in 1818 that on Cape Breton “the Indians are continually wandering from one part of the island to the other: they transport themselves along the shore in canoes: their baggage usually consists of a blanket, a musket, and axe, or tomahawk, and a large iron pot for cooking; also, the peltry and feathers they have collected.”<sup>31</sup> He also observed that the British colonial “government holds out a strong inducement for the Indians to become settlers, and several fine tracts of land have been reserved for the purpose, and some of them have evinced a disposition to improve them.”<sup>32</sup> Barres’s observations are useful in accessing a settler’s view at this time. He was very interested in Indigenous land cultivation, and upon being informed that a local Mi’kmaw man owned and possessed a farm, he

had much curiosity to see the premises, and desired to be landed...the improvements contained about 15 acres of land, a small part of which was planted with potatoes: the exterior of the cottage in which they resided appeared rather neat to the eye; but on entering I was much disappointed at finding it to be but a shell, without any floor or chimney: in the center they had built a fire...in short, it was furnished and used as a wigwam...considering the quality of soil, I pitied their ignorance...they knew nothing of the improvements of lands...<sup>33</sup>

Barres’s observations highlight many of the historical trends in colonial Nova Scotia that this thesis discusses. He mentioned the inducement the colonial government held in transforming the Mi’kmaq into settlers through land cultivation and agricultural pursuits, as well as describing an actual farm maintained by a Mi’kmaw man. The pluralism in European and Indigenous living styles is interesting, although the poor quality of the soil and low or nonexistent agricultural yields should be focused on and viewed as evidence of a lack of initiative on the colonial government’s part in fully supporting agricultural

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<sup>31</sup> B.D. Tennyson, *Impressions of Cape Breton* (Sydney, Nova Scotia: Cape Breton University Press, 2014,) 81.

<sup>32</sup> Tennyson, *Impressions of Cape Breton*, 82.

<sup>33</sup> Tennyson, *Impressions of Cape Breton*, 83-4.



policies. The government distributed seeds to reserves and encouraged the Mi'kmaq to plant them and start farms, but did not provide instructions, aid, or information on how exactly to do this. Even their distributions of seeds, which were supposed to be annual, were not – the implementation of the policies were continually sporadic. Chapters three and four will further examine these policies.

By encouraging the Mi'kmaq to plant seed potatoes the British were pushing them to be farmers, which required them to be less migratory in order to take “proper care” of their crops and livestock: “when the digging season returns they [the Mi'kmaq] come home [Richmond County] to gather in their potatoes and settle themselves down.”<sup>34</sup> Although potato growing and farming in general did influence Mi'kmaw migratory culture for those who embraced farming by compelling them to return to their settlements and tend to their crops during harvest time, it is important to note that they travelled between planting and harvesting seasons. The Mi'kmaq in Richmond County were observed going to Arichat after planting their seed potatoes. Mi'kmaw men usually worked as labourers, and Mi'kmaw women sold their baskets and other handcrafts on the side.<sup>35</sup> They incorporated agriculture into their transience by planting potatoes in the spring, leaving for wage labour afterwards, and returning in the fall to harvest their crops. This combination of agricultural practices and seasonal family migration patterns reflects the type of society the majority of Mi'kmaw families lived in—it was a “mixed economy”

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<sup>34</sup> Rupert D. George to George Edward Jean, Halifax June 28, 1841, “An account of the Indians living within the County of Richmond as taken on the 26<sup>th</sup> July 1841 – at the Indian Chapel Bras d'or Lake being the Anniversary of St. Ann's day.” NSA, Record Group 5, Series P, Volume 8A, Number 14A and 14B.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

whereby Mi'kmaw men and women did everything they could to survive, which meant not relying on just one possible source of income and livelihood.<sup>36</sup>

Agriculture was intended to instill among the Mi'kmaq British concepts of land use and in this way to “civilize” them. This meant inducing them to respect British concepts of private property (and wider concepts of British law) and idealized European family relations, as well as normative gender roles. When European settlers first arrived in what would become Canada, they brought with them their socialized patriarchal framework and perspectives, as did the Jesuits. Gender norms were especially significant, as the missionaries’ gendered expectations were shaped both by their experiences with Roman Catholicism, with its heavy emphasis on the nuclear family and monogamy, and what they considered proper moral conduct for women, and by their eurocentrism, through which they sought to impose normative behaviours for women and what their roles should be in society. Just as Indigenous peoples addressed the Jesuits’ religion through the framework of their pre-existing religion and experiences, Jesuits conceptualized the interactions between Indigenous men and women through their European and patriarchal framework.<sup>37</sup>

When remarking on the dynamics of husbands and wives in Indigenous communities and their lack of servants, the missionary Pierre Biard asserted:

They have no other servants, slaves, or mechanics but the women. These poor creatures endure all the misfortunes and hardships of life; they prepare and erect the houses, or cabins, furnishing them with fire, wood, and water; prepare the

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<sup>36</sup> Parnaby, “The Cultural Economy of Survival,” 73.

<sup>37</sup> See Laura E. Donaldson, “Making a Joyful Noise,” *Interventions: International Journal of Post-Colonial Studies*, 7:2 (2005): 180-98. Donaldson explores the various cultural negotiations that took place between European and Indigenous peoples. This includes the Mi'kmaq's tendency to convert to Christianity to be polite to their guests, but to later revert back to their previous religion. Conversion held a different meaning to them, compared to Europeans. Mi'kmaw women who decorated the Christian cross with pine needles, a ‘double cross,’ is another example of bringing previous existing frameworks to a new situation.

food, preserve the meat and other provisions... go to bring the game from the place where it has been killed; sew and repair the canoes, mend and stretch the skins, curry them, and make clothes and shoes of them for the whole family; they go fishing and do the rowing; in short, undertake all the work except that alone of the grand chase, besides having the care and so weakening nourishment of their children.<sup>38</sup>

Through the framework of European socialization, Biard viewed women as people who should, and could not, perform manual labour. Hard work was reserved for the drudges of society; those who participated in demanding physical labour were the poor and marginalized, and had no option but to do so. With this reasoning, observing Indigenous women performing demanding physical tasks marked them as unrespectable and demeaned to men, as Jesuits assumed some form of patriarchy existed in Indigenous societies. By contrast, Daniel Paul, describing pre-encounter Mi'kmaq society and the division of labour that existed between genders, states:

Women and older children were responsible for such chores as the limited farming the community indulged in, and for collecting, cleaning and preserving produce, game, and fish. No demeaning connotations were associated with the assignment of different community responsibilities to each gender. The division of duties was pragmatically based on which gender was most suitable to the requirements of each job.<sup>39</sup>

Biard viewed women performing manual labour in terms of oppression whereas Paul uses oral history to convey that Mi'kmaw women were more suited for specific types of manual labour than Mi'kmaw men, and as such had different gendered roles, but were viewed as equals.

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<sup>38</sup> Pierre Biard, *RELATION OF NEW FRANCE, OF ITS LANDS, NATURE OF THE COUNTRY, and of its Inhabitants*. Edited by Reuben Gold Thwaites in *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and explorations of the Jesuit missionaries in New France, 1610-1791: Vol. III Acadia 1611-1616* (Cleveland: Burrows Bros. Co., 1897), 99.

<sup>39</sup> Daniel Paul, *We Were Not the Savages: Collision between European and Native American Civilizations*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (Fernwood Publishing, 2007), 19-20.

Mi'kmaq women held status in their communities as a result of their economic contributions to their families and neighbours, prior to colonial settlement. After the British acquisition of Acadia under the terms of the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht, the British held significantly more power in the Nova Scotia colony than the French, who were forced out. As John G. Reid has suggested, the influx of Planters to Nova Scotia between 1760 and 1782 further cemented new Mi'kmaq-British relations<sup>40</sup> The gendered expectations and frameworks the British held during this time, which stemmed from European socialization and also from precedent (echoed in Jesuit observations on Indigenous women, as the *Jesuit Relations* were distributed across Europe and widely read), influenced how Mi'kmaw women were treated in a specific and gendered way that differed from the experiences of Mi'kmaw men in relation to agricultural policies.

Farming was aimed more at men in families than women, reflecting the attempt to impose British gender norms on Mi'kmaw family units. It was hoped that Mi'kmaw women would acquire a new set of values and code of conduct through an agricultural, settled life. A woman would become more attached to her home, a private space, and no longer a beast of manual labour and burden. She would “acquire discipline, modesty, and cleanliness, virtues impossible in a nomadic society, and she would pass these attributes on to her children.”<sup>41</sup> It was argued also that certain agricultural skills, such as raising poultry, gardening, and cheese-making for women, with manual labour chores around the farm for men, were more suitable for Indigenous people than the tighter confines of professions like cobblers, tailors, and carpenters. The argument was that farming differed little from their current outdoor way of life — the only difference being farming would

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<sup>40</sup> Reid, “*Pax Britannica or Pax Indigena?*” 669-692.

<sup>41</sup> Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990,) 18-19.

just be stationary rather than their transient lifestyle.<sup>42</sup> The degree to which these British aspirations actually brought about change in Mi'kmaw communities is hard to gauge, as sources very rarely discuss gender. It is unlikely that they came to much fruition, as many Mi'kmaw women participated in a mixed economy. As William S. Moorsom recorded in his travel book in 1830, "[t]he Squaws sit for hours and days in their smoky wigwams, making baskets, or ornamental trifles, generally sort of mosaic work, in moose hair or quills of the Nova Scotian porcupine, stained of various colours, and worked upon a shell of birch bark."<sup>43</sup> It is noteworthy that Moorsom chose the term "squaw" to describe a Mi'kmaw woman. This term further dehumanizes the Mi'kmaq through gendered language, creating an ever larger racial divide between the Mi'kmaq and non-indigenous people. His description of Mi'kmaq women's craft work does illustrate a common phenomenon in colonial Nova Scotia at this time, however. Mi'kmaw women across Cape Breton mainland Nova Scotia would produce handcrafts and travel to Arichat in order to sell their baskets to supplement the family income. The route from Eskasoni to Sydney was well travelled for the same aspiration of selling handcrafts.<sup>44</sup> Halifax was also a popular destination to sell crafts and products.

One agent in the Nova Scotia colonial government who greatly influenced agricultural policy and practice was George Henry Monk, appointed in 1783 as the colony's first Commissioner for Indian Affairs. Three years later the office closed, and

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<sup>42</sup> Thompson Ferrier, *Indian Education in the North West* (Canada: n.p., n.d.), 27-8.

<sup>43</sup> William S. Moorsom, *Letters from Nova Scotia: Comprising Sketches of a Young Country* (London 1830), 112-3.

<sup>44</sup> Tennyson, *Impressions*, 141; Richard Brown, *History of the Island of Cape Breton, with Some Account of the Discovery and Settlement of Canada, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland* (London 1869), 459; Ronald Caplan, ed., "Annie and John Battiste: A Mi'kmaq Family History," in *Cape Breton Works* (Wreck Cove, Cape Breton 1996), 163-184. The importance of Sydney to Mi'kmaw families from Eskasoni is hinted at in NSA, Record Group 1, Volume 431, Number 48, H.W. Crawley to Joseph Howe, 22 May 1848.

remained closed, until 1793 when Lieutenant Governor John Wentworth reappointed Monk. He did this as a preventative measure as he expected French attacks and feared a potential alliance between the Mi'kmaq and the Acadians.<sup>45</sup> Monk was of the opinion that giving charity only encouraged the Mi'kmaq to laziness and drunkenness. Rather, he thought the colonial government should try to make the Indigenous people of Nova Scotia farmers on plots of land assigned to them. These lands were distributed after 1783. However, encroachment by non-Indigenous people was a grave problem. Consequently, in 1801 the policy of reserve lands was established. At first 9650 acres were reserved on mainland Nova Scotia, and twenty years later 12,250 acres in Cape Breton. Unfortunately, these reserve lands were mostly poor and unsuitable for agriculture.<sup>46</sup> The view that lands in Cape Breton were not ideal was reiterated in the 1841 census in Richmond County – all of the Indigenous farming land was evaluated to be either poor, or very poor.<sup>47</sup> This census document also observed that all the Mi'kmaw communities in Cape Breton were in need of more seed potatoes, that their crops often did not yield produce, and that harsh winters deterred farming attempts. It is important to keep in mind that few, if any, meaningful instructions were provided to Indigenous people with seed potatoes, nor tools supplied.

One way by which the Mi'kmaq negotiated pressures and possibilities that arose from British agriculture policies was through petitions written to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly. Mi'kmaw communities wrote and sent many petitions to the colonial government in attempts to secure their rights and better their situations. Mi'kmaw

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<sup>45</sup> Haigh, "They Must Cultivate the Land," 55.

<sup>46</sup> Haigh, "They Must Cultivate the Land," 54.

<sup>47</sup> Rupert D. George to George Edward Jean, Halifax June 28, 1841, "An account of the Indians living within the County of Richmond as taken on the 26<sup>th</sup> July 1841 – at the Indian Chapel Bras d'or Lake being the Anniversary of St. Ann's day." NSA, Record Group 5, Series P, Volume 8A, Number 14A and 14B.

individuals or groups would frequently need to seek a sponsor to write or to word the petition for them, as the majority of petitions were written in English, with a few exceptions written in French. Most of the Mi'kmaw petitions made reference to farming, even if what they sought did not directly pertain to it. Petitioners were aware of the British objectives surrounding agriculture and land cultivation, and used the colonial government's desires and ambitions to work the system for their benefit. For example, John Baptiste (titled Chief of Indians at the bottom of the petition) wrote in 1829 to the House of Assembly of Nova Scotia concerning a land dispute. His people had long enjoyed possession of 200 acres, but then through an oversight it had been granted to a Peter McChesney. Baptiste petitioned to restore the Mi'kmaw group's rights to the lost land while also detailing their desire to practice agriculture: "...the Indians are now ready to do as other people, so as to work land, build houses, be civilized."<sup>48</sup> Baptiste used the lure of agricultural policy to better his chances of regaining the disputed land. In tandem with using arguments involving farming to attract the attention (and financial aid) of the colonial government, Mi'kmaw communities across the province used similar language in composing their petitions. One petition for aid in helping make farms goes: "We were then strong, but you were stronger and we were conquered."<sup>49</sup> This language stroked the ego of the British colonial government and portrayed the Mi'kmaq as dependents, invoking responsibility on the part of the British. Furthermore, in outlining their difficulties with starting farms, the petitioner said: "Where shall we go! What shall we do. Our old people and young children cannot live, our nation is like a withering leaf in a

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<sup>48</sup> Petition from the Indians of Pomquet, Antigonish County, regarding a land dispute, 1829. NSA, Record Group 5, Series P, Volume 41, Number 104.

<sup>49</sup> Petition for aid to help make farms, February 8, 1849. NSA, Record Group 5, Series P, Volume 45, Number 162.

summer's day.”<sup>50</sup> This scripted language, and manipulation of rhetoric, on top of arguments involving agriculture and land cultivation, represented an effective way of negotiating pressures and possibilities surrounding farming, and of navigating complex Mi'kmaw-British relations.

As of 1827, the Assembly voted between £100 and £150 annually for Mi'kmaw relief. However, this amount was not enough to cover the objective of settling the Mi'kmaq into self-sufficient agricultural communities. In response to the lack of assistance being provided to the Mi'kmaq by the British, Chief Paussamingh Pemmeenauweet petitioned Queen Victoria in 1841, requesting more assistance and describing the Mi'kmaw living conditions in Nova Scotia. The Colonial Office responded by inquiring into the situation—it asked Lord Falkland, the new Lieutenant Governor, for more information on the Mi'kmaq. He responded by proposing measures such as “proper surveys of reserved lands, relief for the infirm, and providing implements and seed.”<sup>51</sup> By 1842 the Assembly was voting £300 annually for Mi'kmaq relief—double the sum provided before Chief Paussamingh Pemmeenauweet's petition.<sup>52</sup> Petitions such as this one occurred throughout the era of colonial control. They were sent out to various individuals and some of them were granted and/or responded to in a positive fashion, much like this particular petition.

It is worth emphasizing that Chief Paussamingh Pemmeenauweet resisted and protested the small sum of money not through violent means, but rather, through the existing colonial legal structure. Writing petitions was a very British way of protesting

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Twohig, “Colonial Care,” 336.

<sup>52</sup> Twohig, “Colonial Care,” 337.



and attempting to create a better situation. Many Mi'kmaw communities wrote petitions and in this way, using a tool the British would recognize and respect. These petitions reveal a complex British-Mi'kmaw relationship, especially in regard to resistance of policies. Although the annual relief sum for the colonial government's Mi'kmaw project was increased, the new amount of funds was nowhere near the amount needed to support initiatives properly, provide assistance, or be consistent with policies. As a result of poor and sporadic funding, agricultural policies were not promoted and encouraged routinely but rather in waves. This meant the means and infrastructure to become farmers and participate in subsistence farming were not consistently for Mi'kmaw communities – even those who did wish to engage in it struggled to do so – although the pressure, desire, and rhetoric from the British side always persisted, if funds did not.

Thus, agricultural policies were supported in theoretical terms by Locke's philosophies, and could be impressively stated on paper as attempting – from the British perspective – to 'civilize' the Mi'kmaq, and yet the implementation was ad hoc and inadequate. There was not enough funding to support the initiative consistently, which resulted in only sporadic energy backing the program. The reserved land did not always allow for farming, even in the absence of potato famines and bad seasons, and the entire situation was made more difficult by the lack of instructions with the seed potatoes. The sum of all of these factors was that the implementation of agricultural policies was ineffective. A revealing contrast is evident when comparing the colonial government's agricultural policies aimed at Mi'kmaw people with the records of the Central Board of Agriculture, which was founded on December 15, 1818, with John Young (better known

as Agricola) as secretary.<sup>53</sup> Young had made a name for himself in agriculture through his letters to the *Acadian Recorder*, where he made suggestions for agricultural improvements. These sometimes included scientific suggestions, as well as theological ones, born from his time in a theological course at the University of Glasgow. In fact, in his first published letter he suggested that local agricultural societies be formed with the next letter advocating for the creation of a central board of agriculture that would govern these societies across the colony. Lieutenant Governor Dalhousie took notice of these letters and praised Young's work – the colonial government also took notice and financially supported the agricultural societies, mostly run by local dedicated farmers.<sup>54</sup> The Central Board of Agriculture oversaw the operation of agricultural societies across the province, with members mostly drawn from social elites. The funding given to this board was enormous compared to the small sum allotted for the Mi'kmaq agricultural policy, which further cemented the poor support and results from the ill-supported but much tooted policy.

An important advocate of agricultural policy aimed at the Mi'kmaq was Abraham Gesner, who on June 11<sup>th</sup> 1847 was appointed Indian Commissioner for Colchester, Hants, Kings, and Lunenburg counties. In the month that he was appointed Indian Commissioner, he reported that “with a moderate degree of aid I feel very sanguine that I shall be able to lead these people to a far more advanced state of civilization.”<sup>55</sup> Part of Gesner's duties involved travelling around southern Nova Scotia, compiling censuses of

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<sup>53</sup> Central Board of Agriculture, RG 9, Vol. 9, No. 1. “Monies raised for the N.S. Agricultural Society from Yarmouth and Digby,” 1844.

<sup>54</sup> R. A. MacLean, “Young, John (1773-1837),” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 7, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed August 25, 2016, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/young\\_john\\_1773\\_1837\\_7E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/young_john_1773_1837_7E.html).

<sup>55</sup> Abraham Gesner to Cornwallis, June 1847 Halifax. MG14, Volume 4, Number 33, NSA.

Mi'kmaq communities, treating illnesses if possible, and distributing seed potatoes and grain. As encouragement for good agricultural practices, on his trips he offered small bounties on the best crops and best fences.<sup>56</sup> He noted that in Halifax, Cumberland, and Hants the potato and wheat crops had failed almost completely. Although the British lacked commitment (and funds) to give serious support to the initiative to encourage the Mi'kmaq to become subsistence farmers, Gesner did manage to convince some Mi'kmaq to remain on the land and continue to farm, and even persuaded previously unwilling Mi'kmaw families to begin farming. He was a firm believer that only settlement and land cultivation could save them – otherwise they would have to accept their grim fate of extinction, which many thought was inevitable because of poor living conditions, poor health, and the ever-present case study of the Beothuk.

In summary, Gesner's time as Nova Scotia's Indian Commissioner represents the final shift in agricultural policies. During his time in this role, the potato famine that was symbolically the last nail in the coffin for agricultural policies took place. Although the colonial government continued to try to enforce the policies, they reluctantly returned to the previous method of dealing with the Mi'kmaq; which was relief policies in the form of meager funds and distributed goods, mostly blankets and coats. Although the agricultural policies actual implementation window was short, limited to the 1840s, the build up to these policies illuminates the development of Mi'kmaw-British relations. That relief funds and policies went from being a temporary resource to a more frequent one is telling of the increasing rise of settler colonialism in Nova Scotia. The influx of groups of people, mostly British and British-sponsored ones, in the late eighteenth century cemented Nova Scotia as more of a non-Indigenous space, where previously there had

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<sup>56</sup> Haigh, "They Must Cultivate the Land," 59.

only been pockets of colonial settlement in a largely Indigenous-dominated space. This shift influenced relations between the Mi'kmaq and the British colonial government. However, the Mi'kmaq were not powerless in this developing and emerging complex shift; fears of their potential threat influenced the emergence of relief funds and goods. Compounded by their use of the still-existing framework of imperial friendship with British officials, and through their use of the British legal system, they petitioned and demonstrated in many ways that they retained the capacity to act in this new social, economic, and political environment. This agency continued through the rise and fall of agricultural policies.

**Chapter Three:**  
**The Precursor to Agricultural Policies:**  
**Relief Funds**

The eighteenth century in Eastern British North America saw many imperial, political, economic, and social changes. Under the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713, France ceded various parts of North America to Great Britain, including the Acadian-claimed colony of Nova Scotia. Various waves of immigration occurred and six colonial wars took place over the span of seventy-five years. After the termination of the Seven Years' War in 1763, Cape Breton Island was annexed to Nova Scotia, and then in 1765 was set apart as its own county. Between 1784 and 1820 it was established as a separate colony, until it was re-annexed to Nova Scotia. Over the eighteenth century, relations between the Mi'kmaq and European imperial powers changed drastically; however, they did not change completely. Various foundational aspects of their relationship lingered or developed into something new. Among these qualities were gift-giving and a rhetoric of friendship, as well as an effort on the part of the British to strength relations with the Mi'kmaq during times of war.

The Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia had a complicated history with both English and French settlers. It is widely accepted that for the most part, Indigenous people living in Mi'kma'ki had relatively good relations with imperial France and French settlers. There are many studies that have examined these relations that are beyond the scope of this thesis. Supporting the Mi'kmaq's good relationship with the French, were their many commonalities. For one, a large portion from each group practiced Roman Catholicism. They also had social, not to mention military affiliations with the Acadians throughout the

18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> All of these factors contributed to the intermittent fear and hostility that the British imperial regime, along with British and British-sponsored settlers, felt towards the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia. Furthermore, although the immigration of some 8,000 New England Planters during the early 1760s, as well as smaller waves of immigration that were enabled by the advancement of British imperial power after the founding of Halifax in 1749, both real and imagined, brought the non-Indigenous population of Nova Scotia close to what it had been prior to the deportation, it did not expand their territory much. As a result, imperial-Indigenous treaty negotiations and 'friendships' were crucial for British security in Nova Scotia at this time, when it remained mostly an Indigenous space.<sup>2</sup> However, this shifted with the defeat of France in Canada in 1760, and with the new and developing phase of settler colonization that began in Nova Scotia towards the end of the American Revolution, tangibly marked with the Loyalist migration.

Approximately 30,000 Loyalists, free and enslaved, migrated to the Maritime region between 1782 and 1784.<sup>3</sup> Already under way, and soon greatly intensified, was a Celtic migration that also made its way to Eastern British America in numbers that paralleled and then exceeded those of the Loyalists. These immigrations brought new

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<sup>1</sup> For studies focused on Acadian responses to imperial and Indigenous persons, see Naomi Griffiths, *From Migrant to Acadian, 1604-1755: A North American Border People* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005); Geoffrey Plank, *An Unsettled Conquest: The British Campaign against the Peoples of Acadia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); John Reid, *Acadia, Maine, and New Scotland: Marginal Colonies in the Seventeenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981); and John Reid, Maurice Basque, Elizabeth Mancke, Barry Moody, Geoffrey Plank, and William Wicken, *The 'Conquest' of Acadia, 1710: Imperial, Colonial, and Aboriginal Constructions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> For further development on the argument of imperial-Indigenous treaty negotiations and friendships, see John G. Reid, "In the Midst of Three Fires, a French one, an American one, and an Indian one': Imperial-Indigenous Negotiations during the War of 1812 in Eastern British America." Paper presented to the Conference on 'The War of 1812: Memory, and Myth, History and Historiography,' University of London, 12-14 July 2012.

<sup>3</sup> For further readings on the Loyalist debate, see Barry Cahill, "The Black Loyalist Myth in Atlantic Canada", *Acadiensis*, XXIX, no.1 (Autumn 1999): 76-87, and James W. Walker, "Myth, History and Revisionism: The Black Loyalists Revisited", *Acadiensis*, XXIX, no.1 (Autumn 1999): 88-105.

settlers who made their presence felt both on the physical landscape and through settler colonization. Not only did settlers present territorial dispossession on an unprecedented scale, their populations also affected fish and animal populations negatively, to the extent that food resources were becoming scarce in select areas. And as Stephen Dutcher has pointed out, colonial authorities' inability, or unwillingness, to control settler encroachments on Indigenous lands was sufficient to ensure that the encroachments continued and worsened with every wave of settler population.<sup>4</sup> Written reports of Indigenous displacement, poverty, and sickness multiplied with the incoming waves of immigration.

The British-Mi'kmaq relationship, which was as John G. Reid argues, based on friendship and negotiations prior to this time, was not totally eradicated within this new context. On the contrary, it provided a framework that allowed communication between the British and the Mi'kmaq, whereby the latter could voice their troubles and concerns, and be heard. The Mi'kmaq leveraged this ongoing relationship through petitions to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly. Much like the Wabanaki peoples' use of petitions, to influence the new geo-political realities of an international border across their homeland,<sup>5</sup> the Mi'kmaq used petitions to involve their influence in Nova Scotia.

Before advancing with the relief funds, it is vital to examine relations in the eighteenth century in order to contextualize how they developed into agricultural policies. The British Empire, both imperial and colonial in Nova Scotia, into the nineteenth century embodied a complex world with various ethnic groups that all functioned socially

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<sup>4</sup> See Stephen Dutcher, "Aboriginal Agency and British Colonial Power in Post-Revolutionary Nova Scotia: A Reconsideration," Paper presented at Nineteenth Atlantic Canada Studies Conference, Saint John, NB, May 2012.

<sup>5</sup> See Micah Pawling, "Petitions and the Reconfiguration of Homeland: Persistence and Tradition among Wabanaki Peoples in the Nineteenth Century." (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Maine, 2010), 558-569.



and politically through negotiated relationships based on history, culture, economics, and private intentions. Although the British Empire's power grew and imperial official's relations with these different ethnic groups, shifted, the negotiated relationships did not change completely. Rather, they held their own nuances and obligations based on the ethnic groups they were with, and the locality and region with different groups of people in the same ethnic group. This is to say, previously negotiated relationships between the Mi'kmaq and colonial and imperial British government in Nova Scotia did not completely change. They persisted well beyond the Revolutionary War and developed with settler colonization.<sup>6</sup>

The term *Friendship* was frequently used by the imperial British to describe the imperial-Indigenous relationship in Nova Scotia in the early-to-middle decades of the eighteenth century, both formally and informally, in a range of documents. During the American and French Revolutions and their ensuing aftereffects, this word was used less frequently as a descriptor in imperial documents, replaced with words such as *Fidelity*, *Allegiance*, and *Loyalty*. As Reid argues, though, the influence of the earlier focus on friendship did not fade away to nothing, but continued to inform and justify Indigenous peoples' search for reciprocity with the British, as well as to encourage imperial officials to be more willing in practice to be lenient where written doctrine and ideology would otherwise be rigid and unmoving.<sup>7</sup>

Friendship in this context usually meant an expression of good will and commitment to good relations between the Mi'kmaq and the British (and British-

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<sup>6</sup> John. G. Reid, "Imperial-Aboriginal Friendship in Eighteenth-Century Mi'kma'ki/Wulstukwik," in *The Loyal Atlantic: Remaking the British Atlantic in the Revolutionary Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012): 76.

<sup>7</sup> Reid, "Imperial-Aboriginal Friendship," 77.

sponsored newcomers) who arrived in increasing numbers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As Reid pointed out, it was a term applied so freely and frequently across North America that to outline its exact use and evolution would be impossible. Writes Reid, “The word resonates in the English/British documentation surrounding relationships formed or attempted in every part of North America where a significant colonial population existed, even where relations might generally be characterized as anything but friendly.”<sup>8</sup> It was also a term with an impressive spectrum; friendship could mean anything from active support, monetary, political, militarily, or otherwise, to the mere absence of antagonism. The imperial understanding of friendship with the Indigenous populations at this time involved incentives for intermarriage between colonists and Nova Scotia’s Indigenous population – long a tradition with the French and the Mi’kmaq, in Nova Scotia as well as elsewhere, and one the British wanted to partake, claimed the Board of Trade: “We are convinced from all Accounts that We have received from America, that nothing so much contributed to Strengthen the hands of the French in those parts, as the Friendship they maintain, and the Intermarriage they make with the Indians.”<sup>9</sup>

Even the royal instructions issued to Governor Richard Philipps in 1719 defined the governor’s responsibilities in language that had no precedent:

And whereas We had judg’d it highly necessary for His Majesty’s Service that you shou’d cultivate and maintain a strict Friendship and good Correspondence with the Indian Nations inhabiting within the precincts of Your Government, that they may be reduc’d by Degrees not only to be good Neighbours to His Majesty’s Subjects, but likewise themselves become good subjects to His Majesty; We do therefore direct you upon your Arrival in Nova Scotia to send for several Heads of the said Indian Nations or Clans, and promise them Friendship and protection on his Majesty’s Part. You will likewise bestow on them, as your Discretion shall

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<sup>8</sup> Reid, “Imperial-Aboriginal Friendship,” 78.

<sup>9</sup> Board of Trade to Lords Justices, 19 June, UKNA, CO218/1, f. 207.

direct, such presents as you shall carry from hence, in His Majesty's Name, for their use.<sup>10</sup>

The references to gift-giving and friendship illuminate the imperial understanding of their relations with the Mi'kmaq – both a show of current good relations and a promise for the continuation, all the while with a bottom line of making the Indigenous population “good Neighbours” and, eventually, “good subjects to His Majesty.” Crucial for the Indigenous part of this friendship, and for the fulfillment of the reciprocal obligations that friendship contained, was gift-giving, described in 1768 by Lord William Campbell as “[b]oth a symbolic embodiment of friendship and an economic redress for the costs associated with tolerating a non-native presence, gifts could come in the literal form of presents offered either routinely or at key moments of negotiation, or in the form of trade on favourable terms.”<sup>11</sup> Through treaties and the various manifestations of reciprocity through friendship, the Mi'kmaq, for good reason, grew to expect gift-giving and friendship as both a constant and something to which they were entitled.

Furthermore, the trend of the British trying to solidify good relations with the Mi'kmaq in times of war contributed to the changing policies. Although the various immigrations to Nova Scotia that took place in the mid-to-late eighteenth century tempered the fear and hostility the British previously held towards the Mi'kmaq, it never subsided completely. For example, even 19 years after Halifax had been founded as a garrison town where the British colonial government largely resided, a British governor of Nova Scotia expressed his fear to London that in the event of a large Indigenous attack against the government, none of the colonial settlements outside of Halifax would

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<sup>10</sup> Instructions to Richard Philipps, 14 July 1719, National Archives of the United Kingdom (UKNA), CO5/189, 427-8.

<sup>11</sup> Reid, “Imperial-Aboriginal Friendship,” 82-83.

survive, and those stationed at Halifax would be unable to defend against such an assault.<sup>12</sup> This fear of a potential military threat was largely responsible for surges and waves of relief policies directed towards the Mi'kmaq following the Loyalist migration until the early half of the nineteenth century by the colonial government's office of Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Nova Scotia.

It is worth mentioning that there are historians who have argued against the Mi'kmaq holding any military or political power against the British following the 1782-1784 Loyalist migration. L.F.S. Upton wrote in 1974: “[b]y 1783 the Indians were to be feared no longer, courted no more. They had been transformed from dreaded warriors into dispossessed wanderers within a single generation.”<sup>13</sup> Upton further elaborated on this in another study, where he suggested, “the arrival of the Loyalists completed Britain's conquest of Acadia,” and made abundantly clear that “the Indians were no longer of account as allies, enemies, or people.”<sup>14</sup> This thesis argues against the notion that the Loyalist migration to Nova Scotia marked the end of the Mi'kmaq as a politically powerful people. Since Upton's study, other scholars have teased out the nuances in the complex and distinct settler pattern present in Nova Scotia during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. John G. Reid has argued this period saw “the continuing Native ability to represent complaints and demands based on longstanding treaty obligations, and to extract conciliatory responses from reluctant imperial officials.”<sup>15</sup> In a different study, he explored the Planter migrations of the 1760s and demonstrated they had limited environmental consequences

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<sup>12</sup> Lord William Campbell to Lord Hillsborough, 25 October 1768, Great Britain, Public Record Office, CO 217/45, 272-3.

<sup>13</sup> Upton, “Indian Policy in Colonial Nova Scotia,” 3.

<sup>14</sup> L.F.S. Upton, *Micmacs and Colonists: Indian-White Relations in the Maritimes, 1713-1867* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1979): 78, 84.

<sup>15</sup> Reid, “Empire, the Maritime colonies and the Supplanting of Mi'kma'ki/Wulstukwik, 1780-1820,” 80.

to the Mi'kmaq.<sup>16</sup> His work has emphasized the limitations of European imperial efforts in Nova Scotia in regard to the Mi'kmaq, which underpin the arguments of this thesis.

Although this thesis examines the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia and colonial British agricultural policies in the nineteenth century, for convenience, it will follow the convention of using the Loyalist migration of 1782-1784 as a starting periodization in examining the beginnings of a new era of British colonial policies directed at the Mi'kmaq. This is, admittedly, an arbitrary and debatable selection, as the foundations of these policies extend much further back in historical trends and events. That being said, the 1780s in general represent a shift; whereas prior to this time, British imperial and colonial influences in Nova Scotia, and especially the military presence at Halifax, were not able to impose control over the Mi'kmaq. Afterwards, the vast Loyalist migration and others of non-Indigenous heritage helped reinforced British imperial and colonial power over the Mi'kmaq. This time represents the beginning of an extended and complicated process, marked by reinforced imperial and colonial influences and also environmental changes occurring as a result of settlers.

New settlers tended to settle easily accessible places first, including coasts for fisheries and areas with rivers. These water sources obviously provided access to water and food, but also to routes of transportation, waste areas, and power for potential saw mills. As well, soil around coasts and river tended to have more nutrients, producing better crops. This settlement altered the Nova Scotian environment, and made it virtually impossible for Indigenous people to avoid new settlers altogether. The introduction of colonial settlement after the Loyalist migration profoundly affected the British government's relationship with the Mi'kmaq, altering many British policies and the

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<sup>16</sup> Reid, "*Pax Britannica or Pax Indigena?*" 687-8.

exchanges between the two groups. This was not surprising, given that the encroachment and the new environmental pressures that came with settlement now increasingly underpinned imperial claims to territory. Through all of this upheaval, however, the Mi'kmaq continued to determine their accessibility to the British and to influence the agenda for meetings with imperial officials, largely through the previous framework of gift-giving and friendship. This is clearly demonstrated through Michael Francklin's point to London that unless he had gifts to bring to a group of Mi'kmaw leaders, he would not be able to get a hearing from them:

It had ever been the Custom, even in times of the most Profound Peace, to Assist Indians Occasionally with Provisions form the Kings Stores, but now it is indispensably necessary, for it is totally impossible to see, or be seen by the Indians... without an Expense of Provisions, exclusive of such, who by age, Sickness or Accident are in such distress as to require assistance.<sup>17</sup>

The Mi'kmaq used the framework of their previous friendship with the British to retain their ability to petition and receive redress when they were in distress, a course of action to which they felt entitled and one the British government needed to make good on. Although this friendship certainly shifted with the advent of settler colonization in Nova Scotia, bolstered (and even jumpstarted) by the Loyalist migration and others, the Mi'kmaq continued to exert their agency by using the previous foundation to negotiate amidst arising pressures and difficult situations. It was both the gift-giving and friendship relations with the British, and the British need to strengthen relations with the Mi'kmaq in times of war and hardship, that contributed to the emergence of sporadic relief funds towards the end of the eighteenth century. These funding initiatives developed into agricultural policies in the nineteenth century.

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<sup>17</sup> Francklin to Lord George Germain, 4 May 1780, UKNA, CO217/55, f.37.

With this social and colonial context in mind, the colonial government's relief system, specifically directed at the Mi'kmaq, takes on a new importance. In 1783 the province reestablished the office of Superintendent of Indian Affairs, which was managed by the British colonial government. This post was meant to be temporary and was to aid in a transitional period. The limited power of George Monk, the newly appointed incumbent at this time, is exemplary of this viewpoint. In one of his first tasks, he was sent to Antigonish to settle a dispute between a Mi'kmaw family and a group of American Revolution veterans over land. The Mi'kmaq were concerned they would lose their seasonal settlement, as the new settlers were continually encroaching on their property. They did not care for the actual legal boundaries of the lot – they just wanted a small area including their church and burial ground reserved to them. Still, Monk found it difficult to get the settlers to concede even that much.<sup>18</sup> He did not write if he was successful or not in this particular case. Settler encroachment on Indigenous land would prove to be a substantial problem. It was also one of the first issues that spurred the Mi'kmaq to adapt their protests.

The late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries saw an unprecedented number of Mi'kmaw petitions to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly. By petitioning the government, the Mi'kmaq worked in the context of preexisting colonial structures to find ways to resist and contest poor social and economic realities. This form of resistance is a markedly British approach to protesting; they used a tool that the British, and the settlers in general, were forced to acknowledge as legitimate. It was a non-violent way of using the British legal system. As previously mentioned, settler encroachment was one of the first

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<sup>18</sup> Monk Letter Book, 1785, George H. Monk to Sir George Prevost, Monk Papers, MG 23, G 11-19, 1030-1, 1035-6.

motivators in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to write petitions. On December 20, 1783, James Pemmenwick, Chief of the band at Shubenacadie, was granted a license for property “sufficient for 9 families being his children.”<sup>19</sup> He was granted this license as a result of petitioning the colonial government, and presenting his case against settler encroachment on lands his family had used and improved for years. John Rudolf of Lunenburg, a settler, helped Solomon Jeremiah, Michael Jeremiah, and others write a petition to request a land grant near the La Have River. In the petition they reference the decline of hunting opportunities because of new settlers, and their desire to farm as reasons why they wanted a land grant. The Lieutenant Governor approved five hundred acres.<sup>20</sup>

The language used in Mi'kmaw petitions, referencing private property and farming, deserve closer attention. Based on British reports, including Joseph Howe's and Abraham Gesner's reports, the Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia did not participate in farming to a great extent. When they did, it was very minor and rarely yielded much. However, the majority of petitions written in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early-to-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century make reference to the desire to start farming and “settling” the land, with the word ‘improvements’ widely used. That so many petitions used this language, but later were reported to have no farms, indicates that they used this type of language to better their chances of achieving goals that did not directly pertain to farming or cultivating settlements. It also shows that the Mi'kmaq were cognizant of British objectives surrounding agriculture and land cultivation, and used the available legal system to the best of their abilities. Another petition that exemplifies this was written by John Baptiste (titled Chief of Indians). He wrote to the House of Assembly concerning a land dispute. His people had possession of

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<sup>19</sup> Memorandum initialed W.A. H[endry], 24 January 1862, Indian Affairs, Vol. 460, Folder 17.

<sup>20</sup> Grants of n.d., and 28 February 1786, Indian MSS., Vol. 430, Doc. 26-1/2.



two hundred acres for a long time, and then through mistake it was granted to Peter McChesney. Baptiste petitioned to restore Mi'kmaw rights to the lost land while also detailing their desire to practice agriculture: "...the Indians are now ready to do as other people, so as to work land, build houses, be civilized."<sup>21</sup> Baptiste used the lure of agricultural policy to better his chances of regaining the disputed land and succeeded.

In 1786 the imperial government decided that it no longer had funds available for the temporary post of Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Nova Scotia. Monk's salary was cut off and the colonial government did not assume responsibility for it. Monk refused to work for free, and the office work went on hiatus. This continued until the outbreak of the third Anglo-French war. The war ignited old fears of invasion and distrust of the Mi'kmaq's loyalty to the British in times of need. Monk rose to the occasion, and continued his unpaid work as Superintendent of Indians Affairs. That the British colonial government's policies toward, and relations with, the Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia were motivated by their fears in times of war is evident in the following situation. Monk was ordered by Governor Wentworth to investigate reports of Indigenous people stealing sheep and scaring settlers in Windsor. At first, Monk was informed that if need be, he could seize Mi'kmaq hostages and confine them in Fort Edward, should they refuse to cooperate. However, Wentworth and Monk decided on an alternative approach, considering the "present causes for alarm."<sup>22</sup> They decided it would behoove them to instead try to win the Indigenous over with gifts of food and clothing, so that "...the peace of our scattered inhabitants may not be disturbed by them, and also that they will

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<sup>21</sup> Petition from the Indians of Pomquet, Antigonish County, regarding a land dispute, 1829. PANS, RG 5, Series P, Volume 41, Number 104.

<sup>22</sup> Monk to Wentworth, 23 July 1793, Monk Papers, 1037.

join us in case of an Invasion.”<sup>23</sup> Wentworth authorized relief supplies as well as food (bread and beef) for the Mi’kmaq of Halifax as well, just to be safe. Monk wrote in his report this practice should be continued regularly to guard against possible “disturbances.”<sup>24</sup> He even theorized that rations of food and relief supplies would be required on a permanent basis to keep the Mi’kmaq as allies. Monk was even writing in 1794 that a further structured policy should be implemented, one that encouraged a rigorous agricultural training system. “Such an Establishment,” Monk assured Governor Wentworth, “would be the Business of a few Years only, and much less Expence on the whole, than to furnish them with occasional relief till they become Extinct.”<sup>25</sup> This recommendation was put away for the time being, and although the imperial and colonial British government was providing relief funds to foster amicable relations with the Mi’kmaq, Governor Wentworth still asked Monk to look for signs of “Democratic french practices among these Savages.”<sup>26</sup> The Mi’kmaq clearly were regarded by the British as a potential threat.

Wentworth did take seriously Monk’s recommendation of a more permanent relief system; at least, a more regular system while the war was waged. Although this infrastructure was expensive, Wentworth managed to produce funds for it by placing the financial burden on the British taxpayers. Hoping that this system would motivate the Mi’kmaq to raise men for war, should they need them, Wentworth was approved for an imperial grant of £200. This fund was petitioned for to purchase potatoes, meal, fish, bread, and clothing, as well, to distribute seed and tools to Mi’kmaq families to

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<sup>23</sup> Wentworth to Monk, 18 October, 1893, *Ibid.*, 295-298.

<sup>24</sup> Major George Deschamps to Monk, 4 November 1793; Monk to Wentworth, 17 November 1793, *Ibid.*, 1040, 819-821.

<sup>25</sup> George Henry Monk to John Wentworth, 23 January 1794, UKNA, CO217/65, f.151.

<sup>26</sup> Wentworth to Monk, 14 January 1794, *Ibid.*, 307-312.

encourage farming practices. In this way, they would learn to support themselves financially, and the relief fund would no longer be needed. (He stressed that this system would not complete itself in one year, though, and petitioned for a following £200 grant for the next year's relief). The British imperial government agreed with Wentworth and Monk, and Dundas even echoed their thoughts when he wrote that the best use of this relief fund would be to situate the Mi'kmaq as self-supporting farmers.<sup>27</sup> This fund was first given in 1793, but continued for three winters until 1796 when the British imperial government pulled their finances. They argued that the emergency facing the Mi'kmaq were not helped by the relief funds, and therefore would never go away. As well, Wentworth had overspent the fund by £656 through various advances. There would be no further relief system in place until the next threat, in 1812, when fears of an United States invasion and the need for allies would once again cause a surge in relief policy.

Between 1796 and 1812, the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia relied on a pluralist system for survival. In the summer months Indigenous communities and families would travel to different villages and towns to sell artifacts made by Mi'kmaw women and men, and to work different small jobs. When the colder weather came, they would travel back into the forests to hunt; if there was little game to be had, they might stay where they had been in the summer. This new pattern influenced developing relations between the settlers and the Mi'kmaq.

Although there was no relief fund in place between 1796 and 1812, in 1800 Monk chaired a committee to consider the conditions of the Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq. The "Report of a Committee to take into consideration Health Officer's Accounts – demands on

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<sup>27</sup> Wentworth to Henry Dundas, 3 May, 9 November 1793, Letter Books of Governor Wentworth, RG1, Vol. 50, n.p. NSA; Dundas to Wentworth, Co 218/27 108-111; Wentworth to Dundas, 19 May 1794, Dundas to Wentworth, July 1794, Wentworth Letter Books, Vol. 51, 107-9.

Government & Transient Poor Act 8 April 1800,” found that the issues facing the Mi’kmaq were not new: destruction of game by settlement, fur and fishing resources depleted, and lack of land. Monk and the committee provided a solution that, though was not a new, had not been implemented in any serious way. He posited that the only solution to the Mi’kmaq’s poor living conditions was to make them all into farmers, and in that way, have them as “useful members of society.”<sup>28</sup> This, they reasoned, could be accomplished with conditioning and coercion. The colonial government would offer aid to those who settled land and cultivated it through farming and improvements, and would simply withhold funds and relief from those who did not. Plans were made and a grant for a fund of £350 was approved to fund the endeavour. Nova Scotian Commissioners were then appointed to report on the conditions (and progress) of Indigenous communities in each county, and to distribute seeds and tools annually. The next steps required, as stated by the Joint Commission, were to survey land where farming could take place, determine the actual number of Mi’kmaq people in each family, community, and county, to, examine the state of the fisheries, determine the expected cost for building houses and providing seed potatoes, clearing the land, and potentially, and explore opportunities to train Mi’kmaq women in spinning and knitting. The Joint committee also mentioned determining the likelihood of Mi’kmaq mothers and fathers placing their children in the homes of white settlers as a form of education. The Commissioners that were appointed to compile this information for every county had a difficult time, and only 5 out of 10

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<sup>28</sup> “Report of a Committee to take into consideration Health Officer’s Accounts – demands on Government & Transient Poor Act 8 April 1800,” RG 5, Series A, Vol.7, NSA, “Report of the Committee on the Condition of the Indians,” 15 April 1800, Indian MSS., Vol. 430, Doc. 33-1/2, 75-6.

replies were received.<sup>29</sup> Following this disappointment, planned surveys of lands were continually pushed back, and the project fell by the wayside and was never executed.

However, by 1807 a new war threat began to emerge as the Anglo-American crisis reached new depths. As before, the British sought to strengthen their unstable ties with the Mi'kmaq through relief policies and funds, in case they should happen to need their assistance in the war; Wentworth promised clothing, arms, and assistance if it was needed.<sup>30</sup> Monk returned to his lapsed post as Indian Superintendent (with pay this time) and put his pen to paper to ask commissioners around the province for their help. Again, a report from each was to be returned to Monk detailing the number of male Indigenous in their areas, their reaction to the idea of a local militia, their ways of life, and where they resided throughout the year. This information was crucial in testing the waters and gathering intelligence on whether the Mi'kmaq were threats. The replies largely stated that the colony of Nova Scotia had little to fear – many Mi'kmaq people were too close to starvation to do much damage, and should a war break out, most would cling to a neutral stance rather than take up arms against the colonial government.<sup>31</sup> However, even with mention of starvation and neutrality, Monk cautioned that they could still do damage and in light of this, he strongly recommended the renewal of a regular relief system for the Nova Scotian Mi'kmaq. Time and again, save for the brief interest in the Mi'kmaq's condition at the start of the nineteenth century, most interest stemmed from military considerations. That relief systems were consistently reestablished in times of war demonstrates that the Mi'kmaq were not “to be feared no longer” after 1783.<sup>32</sup> On the

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<sup>29</sup> Report of the Joint Committee, n.d., *Ibid.*, Doc. 72-1/2.

<sup>30</sup> Wentworth to Monk, 15 October 1807, *Monk Papers*, 517-20.

<sup>31</sup> Circular response, n.d., *Ibid.*, Doc. 145, CO 217/82, 196-205.

<sup>32</sup> Upton, “Indian Policy in Colonial Nova Scotia,” 3.

contrary, the British colonial government very much feared the Mi'kmaq, and this fear was responsible for surges and waves of relief policies directed at the Mi'kmaq. These relief policies were the foundations for the coming agricultural policies that were born out of theoretical and cultural underpinnings as well as a growing humanitarianism movement that demanded better and more consistent interest in the poor conditions the Mi'kmaq faced in Nova Scotia.

The War of 1812 did not see much land-based conflict in an Eastern British North American context. Still, it held profound significance as a turning point for Nova Scotia's Indigenous relationship with both colonial and imperial British forces due to the relatively late advent of settler colonization. Contrary to the notion that after the Loyalist migration to Nova Scotia the Mi'kmaq held little military or political power, the Mi'kmaq did pose a significant threat to British control, especially when combined with French and/or American forces – at the very least, a perceived threat voiced by both British colonial and imperial agents. David Mathews, lieutenant-governor of Cape Breton, wrote in 1797 to imperial powers, that:

the Old Man who was their Leader when the French possessed this Island is still alive and has much influence with the whole Tribe, he has always appeared much attached to the French and has on some occasions recently manifested a Disposition to be troublesome, from which Consideration I cannot help deeming it both prudent and Political to Endeavor to conciliate and keep them [the Mi'kmaq] quiet during the War.<sup>33</sup>

Mathews linked the potential Mi'kmaw military threat in Cape Breton with the French. His solution of keeping the Mi'kmaq quiet during hostile times was in sync with the thinking and actions of colonial and imperial British agents. Concerns regarding the Mi'kmaq's allegiance reflected wider realities prevalent in colonial Nova Scotia during

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<sup>33</sup> David Mathews to Duke of Portland, 2 August 1797, UKNA, CO217/113, f.211.

the era of the War of 1812; one, that the American Revolution had not resolved all of the issues that commenced it, and would be followed by a second wave of warfare, and two, that settler colonization in eastern British America was so recent that its effects for Indigenous, colonial, and imperial relations were in a state of flux and still developing.

All the while, leading up to the War of 1812 and concurrently with it, another pressure was present as a result of the British imperial and colonial relationship with the Mi'kmaq, one grown out of the pre-existing framework of their friendship, previously detailed in this chapter. As expressed, this friendship was never an altruistic one on either end, but one that was theoretically at least mutually beneficial. This relationship limited imperial independence, especially in relation to its control in Nova Scotia's diverse geography, ethnicities, and regionalism; not to mention sparse colonial settlement prior to British and British-sponsored immigrations. Thus, this relationship was forged through negotiated understandings and boundaries. Settler colonization from the Loyalist migration onwards complicated this relationship, but did not destroy it. The imperial-Indigenous relationship had no abrupt ending at any given point, its balance was simply changing and developing, molding to a new shape under colonial pressures. After the War of 1812, the Mi'kmaq continued to use the framework of friendship to seek redress from the British, both imperial and colonial, for violations of British treaty obligations as well as aid in times of need. Following 1812, threats of war and concerns about unfavourable Mi'kmaq alliances with other groups of people against the British in Nova Scotia greatly diminished. Imperial British officials became smaller figures on the political stage, while the colonial state increasingly became responsible for affairs dealing with the Mi'kmaq. It is in this context that agricultural policies came to fruition.

**Chapter Four:**  
**The Rise and Fall of Agricultural Policies**



As demonstrated in previous chapters, there were many theoretical underpinnings and motivations for the colonial British government to employ agricultural policies in Nova Scotia, both historical and cultural precedents, as well as ideological self-justifications regarding property, namely, through John Locke's theories on private property in British North America and historically grounded practices of property ownership. This occurred through "improvements," such as buildings and agricultural developments. However, theoretical justifications and/or motivations were not sufficient reasons in themselves to pursue a colony-wide change in policies. Compounded with these theoretical underpinnings were historical relationships in Nova Scotia. These included the longstanding gift-giving and friendship reciprocity between the Mi'kmaq and the British. Through this relationship, the Mi'kmaq found a framework that allowed them to not only seek redress for poor situations and breaches in treaty obligations, but also to truly believe they had the legal entitlement. This belief fueled their agency in seeking legal actions through the British colonial government through petitions. Also mentioned in previous chapters, the Mi'kmaq used all available tools of aid in doing so, including leveraging the colonial government's interest in farming to negotiate terms of relief. Although the rhetoric of Indigenous farming and "settlement" of their land was for years present in various letters, speeches, acts, proposed bills, and even in private suggestions in government correspondences, the 'serious' implementation of agricultural policies aimed at the Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia began only in 1842, with the *Act to Provide for the Instruction and Permanent Settlement of Indians*. This influential act was rooted in the colonial government's previous policies of relief funds, in the pre-existing

framework of friendship through gift-giving, and mentalities concerning the Mi'kmaq. However, it was a petition written by Chief Pemmeenauweet in 1841 to the Queen that ultimately turned the tide and motivated the colonial government to shift from distributing temporary relief to encouraging as policy permanent settlement and life patterns based on agriculture.

Before the 1780s, settler colonialism was not present in Nova Scotia on a large scale; only in small enclaves of colonial settlement. Its competence and reach was limited in a largely Indigenous dominated space, and was more imperial than colonial in its workings. Monk's appointment as Superintendent of Indian Affairs marked a transitional era in British colonial policies whereby an extended and complicated process emerged as settler colonialism grew with the large waves of British and British sponsored immigrations. One thing to come out of this process was the settler humanitarian movement. In 1814 the North American Indian Institution was formed. With Walter Bromley as secretary of the Institution, it sought to better the Mi'kmaq's circumstances in Nova Scotia through a settler and colonial crusade of settlement. They believed if the Mi'kmaq had their own lots of land set aside specifically for themselves, settler encroachment would cease to be a problem and the Mi'kmaq's health and conditions would improve. Bromley sought financial aid from the New England Company in London, and through personal help from Lieutenant Governor Lord Dalhousie. Content with his success in both endeavours, by 1817 the Institution had twenty-four Mi'kmaw families ready to settle on lands at Shubenacadie. Although Bromley was effective in acquiring funding from the British colonial government to construct an access road to Shubenacadie, his request for funding for the settlement was

rejected.<sup>1</sup> However, only ten days after this petition, Lord Dalhousie sent a message to the legislature concerning the deplorable state of the Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia and stated how help and encouragement should be given to those Mi'kmaq who were willing to farm. It was only a few days after this message was sent that a grant for £250 was awarded to Lord Dalhousie to be used at his discretion for the Shubenacadie settlement.<sup>2</sup> This was the first provincial money since 1803 to be given for a request regarding the welfare of the Mi'kmaq. It is worth noting that Lord Dalhousie leveraged the Mi'kmaq's taking up of farming in order to get funding for the settlement. Although this was one aspiration that was hoped would be accomplished through settlement – that the Mi'kmaq would cultivate the land and become self-sufficient farmers, no longer requiring relief funds or goods from the government – he still capitalized on farming to achieve a short-term goal in the form of funding for the settlement. This demonstrates that colonial officials were, like the Mi'kmaq, inclined to use the rhetoric of farming as a tactic in securing financial support for the Mi'kmaq.

When the Shubenacadie settlement project was first started by the British, it was, by colonial official accounts, a promising developing settlement. Twenty-two of the initial twenty-four families had settled on the land and by 1818 they had cleared 51 ¼ acres. Peleg Wiswall, a local citizen helping out with the settlement and a leader in the initiative, reported to Sir Rupert D. George in 1828 that: “A Root Cellar near each Winters Wigwam and a patch cleared by each family for the culture of a few Potatoes, Indian Corn & Kidney Beans is all that can be looked for during the first few Years [of

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<sup>1</sup> 11 March 1817, JLA (1817) 273, Petition of 27 February 1817, with endorsement, Indian MSS., Vol. 432 (i).

<sup>2</sup> 21, 25, 29 March 1817, JLA (1817): 306, 315, 333.

the Shubenacadie settlement].”<sup>3</sup> Along with these hopes for agricultural developments, local settlers and colonial officials anticipated that Mi’kmaq men would hunt in the summer and trap in the winter, and Mi’kmaq women would make crafts to sell at various markets around the province to settlers. Reports, however, show these goals were difficult to attain, and that the settlement never became the self-sufficient community colonial officials aspired it to be.<sup>4</sup>

Although it never attained the heights officials hoped it would, Lieutenant Governor Kempt had the Shubenacadie settlement in mind as a possible solution when he told the Assembly of Nova Scotia in 1827 that much still had to be done in the way of policies to aid the Mi’kmaq. He outlined their many sufferings, made the point that they were willing to settle and farm land, and emphasized that they could not do so until reservations were surveyed and parceled out for them. This introduction on the context of life for the Mi’kmaq transitioned into what he was asking for: he petitioned the Assembly for funds to make these reservations, for the provision of seeds to farm on the reservation lands once they were allotted to the Mi’kmaq, and for tools such as axes and hoes to help in the agricultural endeavours. The funds would also cover various temporary relief items needed for the weak and sickly.<sup>5</sup> However, the Assembly was not willing to fund such a large and risky project, and instead stuck to familiar territory; £250 was granted for temporary relief only and other funding requests were rejected.<sup>6</sup>

Kempt’s case study is not unique for the early decades of the nineteenth century. Although various petitions in a similar vein were made to the House of Assembly, from

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<sup>3</sup> Wiswall to Rupert D. George, draft, 22 March 1828, Papers of Peleg Wiswall, MG 1, Vol. 979, NSA.

<sup>4</sup> Wiswall to Thomas W. James, 4 January 1836, Indian MSS., Vol. 431, Doc. 22.

<sup>5</sup> Message of Lieutenant Governor Kempt to the Assembly, 9 March 1827, JLA (1827), 74-5.

<sup>6</sup> 5 April 1827, Message of Lieutenant Governor Kempt to the Assembly, JLA (1827): 142.

1827 onward it only awarded between £100 and £150 a year for temporary relief requests.<sup>7</sup> Once granted, local commissioners distributed the relief funds and goods across the province. Individual petitions were sometimes granted up to £50 to build chapels, schools, barns, or another infrastructure. The chances of being granted this type of funding increased significantly if farming or improving the land were mentioned in the petitions. The Assembly did not fund Mi'kmaq settlement initiatives at this time, though. Also at this time in the 1830s, the Cape Breton reserves were roughly surveyed as they were once again part of Nova Scotia's jurisdiction. However, this did little to change the reality that policies on settling the Mi'kmaq were not being supported and had virtually collapsed. It would be another decade until they would be pursued with renewed interest and energy. The impression of the collapse of Beothuk populations may have been partly responsible for this resurgence of interest in the Mi'kmaq's well-being.

In a letter addressed to the Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia, Sir Colin Campbell, dated August 22, 1838, British Colonial Secretary Lord Glenelg asked for an accounting of:

The proportion settled on the land and cultivating it, and the numbers who still adhere to the habits of Savage life, the amount, if any, of property belonging to them, and the effect of any local Statues which may have been passed for their Government. I would request you add to this report any other information which you may consider important, and more especially to favour me with any suggestions as to the measures which would be best calculated to ameliorate the condition of these people.<sup>8</sup>

Requests such as this one were not rare – the British imperial (and colonial) government frequently sent out instructions to gather data on Indigenous people in the colonies with an intent to “improve” their condition. Lieutenant Governor Sir Colin Campbell

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<sup>7</sup> Twohig, “Colonial Care,” 336.

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Lord Glenelg, August 22, 1838, *Journal of Assembly Papers*, 1838, Appendix 80, p. 154.

responded to this direct order by circulating a letter to a number of leading local citizens, which more or less paraphrased Lord Glenelg's request regarding the condition of the Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia. The following quotation was not an atypical response from this correspondence: "with the destruction of their hunting grounds came vagrant and intemperate habits, and decrease of their numbers, chiefly from drunkenness, partly from emigration. All Roman Catholics -- low morals...attributes their degeneration to maltreatment of whites."<sup>9</sup>

Campbell neglected to forward the reports from his circulating letter back to London. The matter was left to collect dust for a few years, until an unlikely petition stirred it at an impressive level. Grand Chief Pemmeenauweet of Shubenacadie petitioned directly to Queen Victoria (bypassing the colonial government in Nova Scotia in favour of going straight to the British imperial one in London) to request relief for his people and for Nova Scotia in general. It was a powerful display and a significant testimony to the dissatisfaction with Nova Scotian colonial authorities. He wrote eloquently and simply:

Madam, I am Pausauhhigh Pemmeenauweet, and am called by the White Man Louis Bengamin Porminout. I am the Chief of my people, the Micmac Tribe of Indians in your Province of Nova Scotia, and I was recognized, and declared to be the Chief, by our good friend Sir John Cope Sherbrooke, in the White man's fashion, twenty-five years ago. I have yet the papers which he gave me. Sorry to hear that the King is dead. Am glad to hear that we have a good Queen, whose father I saw in this Country. He loved the Indians. I cannot cross the Great Lake to talk to you, for my Canoe is too small, and I am old and weak. I cannot look upon you, for my eyes do not see so far...my people are in trouble...My people are poor. No Hunting Grounds, No Beaver, No Otter, No Nothing...All these woods once ours. Our Fathers possessed them all. Now we cannot cut a Tree to warm our Wigwam in Winter unless the White Man please...The Micmacs now receive no presents but one small blanket for a whole family...we look to you the Queen...Your Indian children love you, and will fight for you against all your enemies.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Abstracts of response letters, 29 October 1835, (sic 1838), Indian MSS., Vol. 432, 19-27.

<sup>10</sup> Petition, Chief Benjamin Porminout to Queen Victoria, n.d., but stamped "Received January 25, 1841," CO 217/179/406; microfilm at NSA.

He signed it “Pausauhhigh Pemmenauweet, his mark X.” The petition was received at the Colonial Office on January 25, 1841. Only five days later, a dispatch was sent to Nova Scotia’s new Lieutenant Governor, Lord Falkland. The purpose of the dispatch was to collect more information, as (it seemed) Queen Victoria was personally interested in the matter. However, neither she nor the Colonial Secretary could make an informed decision without more information. The dispatch hinted at recently-lost letters regarding this topic. Thus, further enquiries regarding the conditions in which the Mi’kmaq lived were again requested.<sup>11</sup> Unlike Campbell, Falkland rose to the occasion. He issued his own circular letter, which once again requested information on the conditions of the Mi’kmaq across Nova Scotia. Moreover, he also came across Campbell’s previous circular responses and forwarded them promptly to London, with his own replies, and personal critique of past policies.<sup>12</sup> In this letter, Falkland ventured the opinion that the most flourishing Mi’kmaq community was located at Pomquet, where the settlement had twenty-six families. He also noted that the relief policy for the last decade only consisted of giving out a few blankets to bands, and was of a very temporary nature. He recommended that this practice should be discontinued. In its place, he argued that the relief money should be used for establishing new settlements and maintaining existing fledging ones. To oversee this shift, he suggested that there should be an appointment created for an Indian Commissioner.<sup>13</sup> Falkland’s suggestions and report echoed similar sentiments contained in Lieutenant Governor Kempt’s proposals in 1827 for relief funds

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<sup>11</sup> Russell to Falkland, 30 January 1841, CO 217/177, 128-129.

<sup>12</sup> R.N.N. Henry to John Whidden, 10 January 1842; Charles R. Ward to Whidden, 11 January 1842; E. F. Harding to Whidden, 26 January 1842, Indian MSS, Vol. 432.

<sup>13</sup> Falkland to Russell, 15 July 1841, CO 217/178, 74-76, 89-101.

to be spent on higher quality surveys of land, the proper allotment of said land, and the trappings needed to truly settle the land, those being seeds and tools.<sup>14</sup>

Lord Falkland sought out Joseph Howe and requested his opinion on his proposed new direction in policies for the Mi'kmaq. Howe believed strongly that past suggestions, such as putting a stop to settlers' squatting on Mi'kmaw land, encouraging farming and settlement, and providing English education, should all be pursued and implemented with fresh energy. His one new suggestion was to place an emphasis on the leaders of Indigenous bands and communities by marking them with prestige. In this way, leaders might be more willing to hear out colonial officials and comply. The prestige, Howe suggested, could be conferred by designating a specific house on the new settled reserve for the leaders, along with a new school and church for the community. The school and church would help promote socialization among settlers and further the process of assimilating the Mi'kmaq into the growing non-Indigenous society. The Mi'kmaw leaders' new prominence was to be publicly acknowledged by the British. On top of distinguishing them in their own communities, Howe also suggested making them captains of a militia so that the settler public was also made aware of Indigenous leaders, and to also issue medals.<sup>15</sup>

Falkland's administration took Howe's suggestions into serious consideration. By January of 1842, the Nova Scotia government had prepared a bill that, at least on paper, represented the shift from temporary relief funds to settling and agricultural policies directed at the Mi'kmaq. *An Act to Provide for the Instruction and Permanent Settlement of the Indians* was passed in March of that year and required the appointment of a new

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<sup>14</sup> Message of Lieutenant Governor Kempt to the Assembly, 9 March 1827, JLA (1827), 74-75.

<sup>15</sup> Howe to Falkland, November 1841, Indian MSS., Vol. 432, 1-6.



Indian Commissioner to oversee all of its regulations. The Commissioner was to be responsible for:

the supervision and management of all Lands that now are, or may hereafter be, set apart as Indian Reservations, or for the use of the Indians, to ascertain and define their boundaries, to discover and report to the Governor all cases of intrusion, and of the transfer or sale of the said Lands, or of their use or possession by the Indians; and generally, to protect the said Lands from encroachment and alienation, and preserve them for the use of the Indians.<sup>16</sup>

The fourth clause of the act stipulated that: “In cases where there have been, or hereafter may be, erected or made valuable buildings, or improvements on such Lands, it shall be in the power of the Governor ... [to] convey a legal Title to the Parties accordingly.”<sup>17</sup>

Joseph Howe, with his initial enthusiasm for the task through his suggestions and general moral support, was Falkland’s first choice for the office of Indian Commissioner of Nova Scotia. Although there is no mention of the amounts of relief funds in the act or in Howe’s recommendations, the Assembly increased their voting for relief funds following the act. Whereas before they had voted anywhere from £100 to £150 for relief every year, thereafter they voted for £300 each year. However, the new law did bring one change about in relation to the funding. The relief funds were previously spent at the discretion of the executive of the funds, however, after the law was passed, the Assembly decided how and when the funds were applied. Their Committee on Indian Affairs became the ultimate authority.<sup>18</sup>

Howe spent his first year in office visiting nearby reservations and collecting information for his report. He visited Shubenacadie in May of 1842, but brought back unwelcome news. Most of the reserve’s flat lands that were best suited for farming had

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<sup>16</sup> An Act to provide for the Instruction and Permanent Settlement of Indians, March 9, 1842, *Statutes of Nova Scotia*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Stanley to Falkland, 12 July 1842, CO 217/180 294-301.

been flooded by a dam.<sup>19</sup> The following October Howe continued visiting reserves, although this time he travelled along the western coast of Nova Scotia. He went to eleven sites, and was most impressed with Bear River, calling it a potential “centre of Civilization and information around which the Indians of the North Western portion of the Province might gradually be collected.”<sup>20</sup> Along his travels, he discussed with local settlers and Indigenous people alike the dire need for encouraging the Mi’kmaq to settle the land and become farmers. His first report, dated January 25, 1843, epitomized this thought in one of the opening passages of the report, he outlined his thoughts on how policies for the Mi’kmaq should go forward:

...a given amount of money, skillfully and honestly applied, will make a road or a bridge, which every passenger may recognize as a valuable improvement. But the Civilizing of Barbarous Tribes, the eradication of habits and prejudices formed with the growth of Centuries, the substitution of one kind of knowledge, absolutely indispensable to success, or even existence, in a new state of Society, for another kind, equally important in the old, is a work of time, that may be entered upon in a season, but which cannot be completed, or yet advanced, even under the most favourable circumstances, but by perseverance in a series of enlightened experiments running over a period of years.<sup>21</sup>

Howe was essentially explaining, in his view, the importance of assimilating the Mi’kmaq with a long-term plan.

In his report, he deduced that there were at least 1,300 Mi’kmaq people left in the province. He came to this number by taking the 1838 *Indian Statistics* (Which listed 1,425 Indigenous people in Nova Scotia) and subtracted 10 percent to account for death and the toll of disease among the Mi’kmaq of late.<sup>22</sup> Through looking at the Indigenous

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<sup>19</sup> Commission to Joseph Howe, 11 May 1842, Indian MSS., Vol. 432, 68-73.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 77-119.

<sup>21</sup> Indian Commissioner Joseph Howe’s Report, *Journal of Assembly Papers*, January 25, 1843, Appendix 1, 3; Microfilm at NSA.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

population over the last few decades he rationalized that historically the Mi'kmaq were declining at a rate of 10 percent, and therefore he could safely apply that number to estimate the current population, assuming the declining trend remained the same and allowing for a small margin of error. However, he did realize the difficulty and limitations associated with using census and statistically-extrapolated numbers:

It is impossible, however, to estimate the ratio of decrease by the numbers in any particular County or Locality, because almost every family which has not a framed house moves two or three times in a year, and such Counties as King's and Pictou, where the population is rapidly decreasing, the forest disappearing before the axe, and Mills either damming, or in course of erection upon every stream, are very likely to be deserted for others, where, from the indifference of the soil, the march of improvements is not so rapid.<sup>23</sup>

As well as musing on the limitations of real-world application of statistics, Howe also indirectly described how settlers were running the Mi'kmaq off their own lands, through improving and settling land by cutting down the forests, which effectively took land and food away, and by creating dams that diverted and dominated water sources and fishing.

Howe also admitted in his report that he had yet to travel to the eastern parts of Nova Scotia, but that he knew the decrease of Mi'kmaw people in the County of Halifax has been less so than the rest of the province: "...for, although the deaths in proportion to the numbers may have been equal, there is an immigration towards the Capital, particularly in the Summer Season, partly for Religious objects, and partly for the sale of small wares manufactured by the Squaws."<sup>24</sup> Mi'kmaw women often went to Sydney or Halifax (among other areas) to sell handcrafts in an emerging context of occupational pluralism, or, as Andrew Parnaby called it, a mixed economy.<sup>25</sup> This represented a meeting of the "old" way of life, that of hunting, trapping, fishing, and seasonal

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> See Parnaby, "The Cultural Economy of Survival," 69-98.

migrations, with the new, that of settlements, agricultural pursuits, and pluralism. Mi'kmaw men and women worked for wages and sold crafts while maintaining older practices of seasonal family migrations as well as partaking in a local economic and cultural network. This combination of old and new formed the material basis of Mi'kmaw society in the nineteenth century, influenced by settler colonialism through geopolitics and socioeconomics.<sup>26</sup>

As noted, the *Act to Provide for the Instruction and Permanent Settlement of Indians* was a major turning point for agricultural policies. Whereas the colonial government was previously of the mind that temporary relief funds in the form of blankets and coats were what was needed, Howe and others fought for these funds to be used instead to encourage settlement and agriculture, to reform Mi'kmaw people's concepts and utilization of land, and in this way, to 'civilize' them. Howe wrote that he became increasingly strict as to who was granted individual relief funds and goods: "the rule I adopted was to give relief only to the old and infirm, the sick and maimed, or to those who had met with some calamity, which, for the time, gave them to consideration." However, he did not end the previous manner of relief altogether, stating that:

For many years past, the Legislature has granted £100 per annum for the use of the Indians, which has usually been laid out in Great Coats and Blankets, to be distributed in various parts of the Province. I knew that many would calculate on this resource...a portion of the funds would have to be thus applied...until they were taught that they must provide clothing for themselves.<sup>27</sup>

Part of Howe's duty as Indian Commissioner was to evaluate the lands on Mi'kmaw reserves, and the likelihood for the Mi'kmaq to become farmers. Howe wrote:

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<sup>26</sup> See Parnaby, "The Cultural Economy of Survival," 5, 24.

<sup>27</sup> Indian Commissioner Joseph Howe's Report, *Journal of Assembly Papers*, January 25, 1843, Appendix 1, 3; Microfilm at NSA.

It is to be regretted that so little judgement has been exercised in the selection of them [the land]; the same quantity, if reserved in sorts where the soil was good, on navigable streams, or in places where fish were abundant, and game within reach, would now be a valuable resource. All the land reserved in this County [Halifax] is sterile and comparatively valueless. In Yarmouth, Hants, Colchester, Pictou and Guysborough, there are no Reserves, and in some other places, as at Pomket, and in parts of Cape Breton, it is to be feared that the quantity has been somewhat diminished by the encroachment of the whites. In the neighbourhood of Dartmouth and Halifax, where the Indians from all parts of the Province resort, at all seasons, particularly in the Summer, they had no Lands, and are consequently compelled to build their camps on private property, and are tempted to destroy the wood, and commit depredations which are becoming every year more annoying and vexatious.<sup>28</sup>

The colonial government, along with the individuals responsible for implementing the acts and laws meant to govern the Mi'kmaq population of Nova Scotia, knew the limitations and poor quality of the reservation lands posed for farming and general settlement. Not only was the land barren in much of the province, but where the land was fertile or had natural resources, settlers encroached:

An illustration of the mode in which the Aboriginal have been deprived of the property, to which were often entitled by Grant, or by uninterrupted possession, a case may be mentioned... A tract at Indian Point, in the Township of Chester, on which there is an excellent limestone quarry, and which is now valued at 500, was purchased 20 years ago, by a person named Cook, who took a Deed from one of three Brothers to whom it was Granted, giving a Note of Hand for 10 in exchange...but there was no satisfactory proof that it was ever discharged [after the death of the Indigenous man who initially held the grant]. Meanwhile the white man has almost secured a Title by possession, and has certainly established a claim to the consideration of the Government by extensive improvements; but the children of the Indians, who are attached to the spot, still mourn over the loss of what they regard as their rightful Inheritance. This dispute I have endeavoured and hope to compromise, by obtaining for the Indians a payment equal to the value of the land in its original state.<sup>29</sup>

Settler encroachment was a major problem for the Mi'kmaq and the colonial government charged with protecting their lands. Representing the lack of commitment the colonial

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

government had in supporting its agricultural policies aimed at the Mi'kmaq, the government cited its small budget as a defense, and argued that it did not have the financial means to pursue legal action against the illegal squatters on Indigenous land. They also did not have the able manpower – even Joseph Howe, who was the Indian Commissioner in charge of the operation, was not paid and only worked on a part-time basis, and could dedicate “only the leisure hours which could be borrowed from other and various duties, both of public and private nature...”<sup>30</sup>

Even with the known dubious quality of the land, the settler encroachment, and various other difficulties, the colonial government still pushed for the Mi'kmaq to become farmers and to settle the reserve lands. Agricultural policies were heralded under the section “Seed, Implements, Cattle” under the funds allotted by the Assembly, which amounted to £12 8s. 7d. Howe:

...would have gladly increased this item, but [he] found it would be of little use to make extensive distributions until... the Government could have some assurance that the bounty granted would be well applied. [He] could have given away hundreds of bushels of potatoes in the Spring, but they would have been eaten and not planted, [he] therefore refrained, often under very pressing importunities, and in no instances assisted those who had not some cleared land in occupation, and who showed a disposition to help themselves.<sup>31</sup>

The policies the colonial government aimed at Indigenous people in Nova Scotia were sporadic, poorly funded, and poorly managed. They ranged from distributing blankets and coats, purchased with temporary relief funds, to refusing those who asked for these products in winter, in favour of encouraging and pressing the Mi'kmaq to instead take seed potatoes and tools (when they could be given, which was not often) and cultivate the lands they were given. These agricultural and settlement policies were not helpful to the

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

Mi'kmaq, and they also took their toll on Indian Commissioners. There was no warehouse for supplies they did distribute to Indigenous communities in the winter. Instead, the Indian Commissioner's basement was used for storage, and Mi'kmaw people would come from all over to ask for them. Howe's enthusiasm for the task of ameliorating conditions for the Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia quickly waned. His second Commissioner report, in 1844, was his last.

For the previous decade, the official government line for Indian affairs had been to settle the land and to adopt a way of life based on farming. If the Mi'kmaq did this, they would be rewarded with more land, possibly even grants that would legally give them ownership of lands, as well as become educated, productive members of a settler society and colony. Seeds had been distributed, farming methods encouraged through Howe and others' visits across the province. However, by the mid-nineteenth century, it did not matter what the quality of lands were for any individual in Nova Scotia as any effort to farm potatoes became impossible. A widespread potato blight destroyed all potatoes planted for three seasons, from 1846 to 1848. John Lissous's petition on behalf of himself and 39 Mi'kmaq at Windsor in 1846 display the beginnings of the potato blight and how the agricultural policies could not withstand this setback:

That your Petitioners Forty in number are in a state of great distress, in want of food and clothing, and that without they can obtain, thru your Excellency's interception, some relief, they must suffer the extremity of distress, and intimately perish for in part of the commonest necessary of life: they have heretofore obtained a wretched subsistence by making of baskets, and each other occupations as your Petitions are capable of farming, but they are now, in consequence of the general distressed state of the country from the loss of the Potato crop, and the failure of the wheat, unable to obtain any sale for such article as Indians are capable of manufacturing.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> John Lissous to the House of Assembly, 15 Nov. 1846, RG 5 Series P. Vol. 44 No. 135.

The reality was that agricultural policies were not the answer to the distressed state of the Mi'kmaq in colonial Nova Scotia. They could not withstand poor weather, poor soil, and agricultural diseases that were bound to happen from time to time. They were also sparsely funded, sporadically supported and encouraged, and in general poor. The relief policies from which agricultural approaches had evolved were again sought out, and the colonial government reverted to the previous policies for the next couple of decades, until Confederation in 1867.

The Mi'kmaq who did try to adopt a farming way of life were dealt a hard blow, which was further compounded by diseases that appeared to have hit them harder than they did settler farmers. Dr. Robert Leslie described in his medical notes a “Remittent Fever attended with great Prostration of the Vital Powers” among most of the people at the Bear River reserve. He theorized that the disease hit the Mi'kmaq much harder and was more prevalent among them because of the poor and scarce food most Mi'kmaq people had access to, and their damp living conditions, usually on the bare ground.<sup>33</sup> Not to mention that the Mi'kmaq had been dealing with health concerns with every new immigration wave. This is well illustrated in a petition written by a man named Nixon on behalf of the Mi'kmaq of Pictou to Sir John Wentworth:

Sir, I have to inform you since a number of Emigrants have arrived from Scotland at Pictou and the Vicinity and bringing with them the Small Pox, Measles, and Whooping Cough the Indians who have situated near that Place for fear of those those Disorders have fled and are now Situated at the head of Guysboro River to the amounts of forty or fifty Familys, and are in a very wretched situation for want of clothes Provisions and other, and its Doubly hard upon those Poor Creatures they being deprived of coming Last Year to Halifax on amount of the Small Pox so that they have been deprived of relief for upwards of two years – if Your Excellency will be Pleased to grant those poor beings any relief it will be act of the Greatest Humanity.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Dr. Robert Leslie to Alfred Whitman, 30 October 1846, Indian MSS., vol. 432 (i).

<sup>34</sup> Nixon to Sir John Wentworth, 20 July 1801, RG 1, Vol 430, No. 88.



This petition notes that the Mi'kmaq of Pictou had used a mixed economy, travelling to Halifax to both seek relief funds as well as potentially selling handcrafts and seeking other forms of livelihood, as well as describing a particular way in which sickness impacted Mi'kmaw communities. On top of settlers making the Mi'kmaq sick, even the fear of sickness uprooted Mi'kmaw communities and displaced them – in this case, from Pictou to Guysborough, not a small distance even by today's travel standards. Not only did the potato “disease ma[k]e a mockery of all the much touted comfort and stability of the farming life,” but “new hope of settling the Indians had been dealt a serious blow by the crop failures [in general]. The customary system of relief, which education and settlement were to have made unnecessary, became more important than ever.”<sup>35</sup>

Confederation marked the transfer of governmental responsibility for the Mi'kmaq from the British colonial government to the new federal government. In Indian Commissioner Samuel Fairbank's last report, dated December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1866, he estimated that the Mi'kmaw population level was somewhere between 1,400 and 1,800. As well, he wrote that there were 20,730 acres reserved throughout mainland Nova Scotia and Cape Breton for 637 families. Few had taken up farming, and agricultural policies had largely been unsuccessful across the board. He also summarized that the settler encroachment problem was now reserved, with most of them having bought their holdings at a fair price.<sup>36</sup> Further cementing the fall of agricultural policies was the Assembly's Indian committee's last suggestion in April, 1867, on the future of governmental policies directed at Indigenous people: to grant the same amount the provincial legislature had done, appoint someone to oversee the process (another Indian Commissioner), and award

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<sup>35</sup> Upton, “Indian Policy in Colonial Nova Scotia,” 3-31.

<sup>36</sup> Report of the Indian Commissioner, 31 December 1866, JLC (1867), Appendix 6, 1-2.

relief funds and goods such as coats and blankets. Settling them through agricultural policies was not a viable option. The report said that this failure was “owing to their own nature and habits.”<sup>37</sup> Fairbanks continued as the Indian Commissioner for Nova Scotia, and was appointed Dominion Agent in 1868. The new government of Canada was slow to create a new system looking after Indigenous people. The large shift in operation occurred at the start of the 1870s when the old system ended. Every province in Canada was thereafter divided into districts; with each one assigned an Indian agent who was to report directly to Ottawa. In Nova Scotia, agents were hired on a part-time basis, versus full time positions elsewhere in Canada. The Mi’kmaq became a federal responsibility, along with all of the other Indigenous people in Canada.

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<sup>37</sup> Report of Indian Commissioner, 31 December 1866; Report of Indian Affairs Committee, 29 April 1867, JLA (1867), Appendix 39.

**Chapter Five:**  
**Conclusion**

In their daily lives the Mi'kmaq of colonial Nova Scotia demonstrated agency that is sometimes wrongfully denied to them by historians today, both legally and through various forms of historical storytelling. Although their lives were influenced by imperial and colonial politics, and further shaped by settler colonialism with Nova Scotia largely becoming a non-Indigenous dominated space after the Loyalist migration and other immigrations, the Mi'kmaq continued to use the available tools they had at their disposal in efforts to weather these storms. They did this by participating in a mixed economy whereby Mi'kmaw men and women both used their labour to acquire a livelihood as well as Mi'kmaw cultural skills to produce crafts also establishing economic survival in a new social and political economy. When British colonial officials in Nova Scotia began to strongly encourage agricultural policies in the nineteenth century, fashioned by ideological, historical, and culturally British ideals such as John Locke's writings on private property, as well as notions of ownership and possession and civilization, the Mi'kmaq did not bend to the pressure. Instead, they relied on their previous friendship framework and gift-giving relationship with British imperial officials to negotiate new understandings and relations. Using the British legal system to seek redress from treaty breaches and distressed situations compounded this approach. That they used this system to protest as well as sometimes position themselves in such a way that they were able to leverage British aspirations against the colonial government, namely, that they used the British desire for Indigenous people to become farmers to better their own situations, whether it was a community or individual effort, is highly important. The Mi'kmaq had

the capacity to act in their social, economic, and political environment, and did so in many diverse ways.

Although the agricultural policies were short-lived in their actual implementation, and sporadically and poorly implemented at that, the British desire and aspiration to transform the Mi'kmaq into self-sufficient farmers, effectively assimilating them into settler society, was influential in regard to the reservations that were parceled out in Nova Scotia that continue to exist to this day, as well as mentalities that were carried over in the *Indian Act* in 1876. By studying and following the development of agricultural policies, from the increasing settler colonization after immigrations to Nova Scotia, to their beginnings through relief policies and Mi'kmaw-British friendship and gift-giving, the rise and fall of agricultural policies illuminate important colonial relations, ideologies, and politics that continue to influence the daily lives of Indigenous people. Being aware of these historical trends and events contextualizes the present and allows for a better understanding of Indigenous land claims, dispossession, and social movements.

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