AN HISTORIAN'S ADVENTURES IN ARCHIVIA AND BEYOND¹

I have to say at the very beginning that I have found no marvellous treasure trove of letters. My research has added not one original document to the Archives of this country. In this respect I am a perfect termite feeding upon the work of others. I admit to having run across odd things in odd places, such as Bliss Carman letters in the library of the University of King's College. But I did not put them there. I cannot think of the reason why King's should have them, but there is no reason at all why they should not.

There must be people who find Archives dull, people who find archivists incomprehensible. There must be, surely, people whose minds mortify, whose whole being commences an insidious process of dessication the moment they enter an archives. The very smell of an archives stultifies them; their touch goes limp, their eyes glaze, and they disconsolately sit down, with a heavy sigh, to begin the dreary task of dredging some meagre facts from the dirt, dust and tatterdemalion remnants of the past. Archives, like Stephen Leacock's banks, rattle them.

There must be, I say, people like that. I am not one of them. Theirs is not an experience I can share. My own reaction to entering archives or libraries can only be described as visceral. Why this should be so, I do not know. It may go back to some primitive association, I know not what. I do remember, when I was adolescent, my route to the Saint John Public Library lay along a cobblestoned and at that time notorious street in Saint John, where heavy-wheeled dray carts lumbered with barrels of flour and pieces of lumber, and where peeling and painted ladies leaned from peeling and unpainted houses. I would be carrying an armful of books, Zane Grey or James Oliver Curwood. I remember being struck by a contrast, the contrast between the glories of Zane Grey, his women beautiful and thoughtful, still sibilant with longing as their lovers galloped away (for two-thirds of the book) across the purple sage, and the grim realities of the life I observed through the windows of those Pond Street houses. Opting for Zane Grey and the library was a kind of metamorphosis of emotion, with heaven knows what adult consequences, but useful perhaps in the circumstances, since I had no money anyway, and would not have known what to do with it if I had.

Or perhaps this association with libraries and archives with nervous excitement goes back to an earlier and quite minor adventure by canoe in the back shield country of Hastings County, Ontario, somewhere near Marmora, when I was about 8. We were two boys canoeing on the Crow River, not very far from where we were staying, though it seemed miles. We were explorers, of course. We came

¹ A paper read at the Annual Meeting of the Society in Sackville, June 18, 1973.

upon a conspicuous point and went ashore near where we had spotted an old clearing. There in the clearing, miles from anywhere as it seemed to us, was an abandoned log cabin, the roof fallen in, the floor rotting and insecure, the logs gray and flaked with the patina of age and weather. Grass growing over the door jam swayed in the summer wind. All was silent. A distant crow's call only marked it the more. It was to us a haunted place, haunted not really by ghosts, though we were vaguely uneasy about them (I wish I had known then that an old Peterborough man once told Susannah Moodie, "There ain't no ghosts in Canada; the country's too new for ghosts."). No, the place was haunted by we knew not quite what. An adult would have said, haunted by memories of the people that once lived here. Who they were we never knew, though we hunted for relics. We even hoped to find treasure. But under some boards we did find an old newspaper, ages old it seemed, though it probably did not go back more than a dozen years. *There* were our ghosts, so to speak, in print, in the old advertisements, the strange headlines, the whole sharp sense of an age vanished and gone that rose to our nostrils with the very smell of the oxidized pulp paper that came up hot from the dusty boards. It says something of our awesome impression of that lone newspaper that we did not bring it away with us, but instead, put it back where we had found it, as boys sometimes will, out of a queer sense of reverence for it. We never went there again.

In later years this sense went over to old books in attics, old handwriting and dedications inside covers. "To Aunt Mary with much love, Nan, Christmas, 1899." Who was Aunt Mary? What was Nan like? Where are they now? The "now" was the 1930's. There was a stamp stage too, the fascination of age and of letters compounded by distance. It started with a postcard I once received from a family friend who had travelled to the Fiji Islands. The stamp interested me more than the picture on the card. It seemed more truly symbolic of the mystery of Fiji than any picture. George V stared sternly out into an imperial distance, utterly serene and secure in his possession of Fiji. I never liked buying stamps much; it seemed too artificial. Such stamps had no reality in terms of one's own experience; they should come warm from the envelopes, alive as it were.

All this suggests the making of a perfectly decent, docile antiquarian nature, the kind that loves anything old because it is old, trailing, as it goes, clouds of sentimentality through its little world, a world where all facts, being old, are equal. It is the kind of nature exemplified in dozens of historical societies across Canada and elsewhere, that now seem to me populated with sweet old ladies with high-pitched voices and rather dirty fingers, and nice, tousled old gentlemen with rumpled waistcoats and an air of well-seasoned jocularity. They all thrive on genealogy. Harassed archivists tell me they wallow in it. The metaphor I prefer is of an inquisitive kitten who has discovered the adhesive virtues of about three feet of unusually sticky fly-paper. But for all that, there are worse things in life than these societies, and one can have an affection for the old and sometimes salty characters of this world who often belong to them.

Still, one's historian's instinct has more residual yearning for an old fisherman, carpenter, boat-maker, sailmaker, old businessman, or even a lawyer or judge, people who have felt the beat of life a bit harder, whose ideas come from closer to the bone. Here one is led gradually, perhaps insensibly, into history, not

just antiquarianism. For there is a difference. It is the difference between Eaton's Catalogue of 1901 and let us say, John W. Dafoe's *Clifford Sifton in relation to his times*. One is a potpourri: the other is a sorting out. In the process one ends up with men whom one admires, enjoys, almost hears speaking. One discerns structures and patterns, which may have validity if one continually tests them, and does not allow them to become monuments to one's own vanity. In any case, I do not see how a man can be a historian without observing human beings in the present *and* the past, so that we may read them better in both. Have you not often watched the way a colleague's mind works, the way his emotions deploy his intellect, and said to yourself, "he reminds me," of D'Alton McCarthy, or of Montaigne, or of Fanny Wentworth or whomever. One person in history for whom I have not yet discovered any contemporary paradigm is William Ewart Gladstone. There can't be many like him. Just his wife's admiration, for one thing. Do you remember the story of a lady visitor to Mrs. Gladstone at Hawarden? The two women were about to have tea, and were commiserating with each other over the state of the world in general and England in particular. The lady visitor sighed, and then said, "But isn't it comforting to think that there is Someone above us who looks over us and protects us?" "Yes," said Catherine Gladstone sweetly, "William will be down in a minute."

Unless we see history as men acting and interacting, sometimes by deliberation, more often by chance, it becomes a net of abstractions like "responsible government," "economic forces", "social dislocations", "revolutionary principles." These are merely collective expressions for collecting the uncollectable. Behind it all there are only men. There is not much doubt that men can act differently in groups than they do as individuals; but, though the sociologists and social psychologists love "peer groups" and other collective nouns suggestive of collective action, they are more often than not meaningless conveniences. The very word "cabinet," representing the collective action of a government, conceals the infighting and sharp cross-fire that often precede any agreed collective decision. History is made by men: geology and physics are made by forces.

I often wish historians were more humble. We are often so sure of ourselves. We happen on a letter from John A. Macdonald to George Stephen. It looks and feels like Macdonald; it is Macdonald;

You have sometimes told me that I did not appreciate your difficulties.
Your note of the 24th shows that you have not yet grasped mine
I showed your note only to one colleague and his immediate reply
was that as fast as we got you out of one trouble, you tried to plunge
us into another & we had better break up the whole arrangement.

Here one has to ask questions. For one thing, Stephen's note of 24th is missing. Stephen frequently instructed Macdonald to burn his letters. Macdonald did, some of the time. For another, did Macdonald show this letter to anyone else in the Cabinet? He was quite capable of putting this on for its effect on Stephen. As one old colleague said of him, "He is *such* a dodger." Such considerations of evidence are part of a historian's *métier*, as they are of lawyers' and judges'. They are, if you like, elementary. My argument is that they ought to make historians humble, but we are not, any more than are lawyers or judges, or I

might add, doctors. Professionalism seems to make all men cocksure, and when they aren't cocksure, they sometimes pretend to be. It should be the other way round. Historians should be humble, and when they are not, they should pretend to be.

For how little is preserved! How little we know! We see the top of the iceberg and nothing more. The rest is fathoms deep and its configuration we can only imagine. In this sea we can look only above the surface. And even our evidence, that top of the iceberg, looks very different if we could see it from the other side. Sometimes we can. Have you ever seen the Matterhorn from the Italian side of the Alps, from Breuil? You would hardly recognize it as the same mountain that you see from the Swiss side, from Zermatt. It is always useful to go around the other side of things if you can. If you can't, one ought to believe that there is another side, whose configuration you can perhaps imagine, provided you remember the Matterhorn, *i.e.* that the other side will in all probability not be the way you think it is. You all, I am sure, remember *Rashomon*, the Japanese film, where the same incident is filmed from four different points of view, and then the final version, which is what really happened. *Geschichte wie es eigentlich gewesen!* We can't know it, but we have to try to know it.

Newspapers have this one-sidedness, only more conspicuously. They will write firmly, even eloquently, from their own party point of view. Edward Farrer, one of the most brilliant Canadian newspaper writers of the late 19th century, used to say that when he had finished an expository editorial it was so well made that the only person in the world who could make effective reply was Edward Farrer. He even volunteered to do so. From such stuff the historian must try to reconstruct the truth. It is not easy. One must start with not just scepticism, but with judgment. One cannot apply scepticism equally in all directions. It is not so much a measured dose of medicine as an attitude of mind. I remember that when I was a Ph.D. student I'd run across an interesting remark in one of the Saint John newspapers at the time of the New Brunswick political crisis of April, 1866. The Lieutenant-Governor, Arthur Gordon, had wanted to find the Premier, A. J. Smith, before the Governor's important, indeed crucial, meeting with the Legislative Council of New Brunswick. It was a matter of hours. Premier Smith could not be found. An anti-Smith paper in Saint John alleged confidently that Smith could not be found because he did not want to be found, that he deliberately hid in order to provoke the crisis that resulted. I told all this to a wise old historian who knew something of this event. "Humph," he said, "newspapers can print anything they like. Don't commit yourself *to that* position." In due course I found from newspapers supporting Smith that it was the Lieutenant-Governor who did not want to find Smith and made only a superficial effort to get in touch with him. One thing was clear: both men were playing politics to the hilt and over a vital question, Confederation. The Lieutenant-Governor had to turn out the Smith government with some show of constitutionality, and he had found a means by which he believed he might do so: the Smith government did not intend to be turned out, even constitutionally, if it could help it. In the end the Government was out-manoeuvred. But what the real events were on that memorable Saturday, April 7, 1866, I have never found out. Nor do I expect to. Smith's papers were all burnt after his death in 1883, so it is believed. He died not far from here, at Dorchester, New Brunswick. If you

are wandering around during the next few days, keep your eyes open. They may turn up yet.

For you never know. Some of you may know the story of the George Brown Papers. Maurice Careless did his Ph.D. thesis for Harvard on George Brown, and in the process discovered no trace of the letters that Alexander Mackenzie had used, and quoted, in *The Life and Speeches of George Brown* that he published in 1883. It was a pity really, but it appeared that Mackenzie, with Mrs. Brown's consent, had burned the letters after he had used them. A diligent Ph.D. student, Careless nevertheless contacted the Brown family in Scotland. They had some family letters, but these were closed and not available. That, it seemed, was that. George Brown, even with Maurice Careless' more ample Ph.D. researches, could only be what the evidence allowed him to be; he still came through as a bold, argumentative, rather unlovely Scot, who had inexplicably married, late in life, at the age of 43, and who had made a great success of running the *Toronto Globe*. Then, a few years later, Careless was giving a speech to a woman's club in Toronto on George Brown and Canadian history. After the meeting a lady came up to say she had enjoyed the speech and that she was a descendant of the Brown family. Did Careless know that there were family papers in Scotland? Yes, he knew, but he also knew that they were closed. "Ah, yes," said the lady, "they *were* closed. But there are younger members of the family on the scene now. Why don't you try again?" This was done. The Brown descendants were friendly and helpful. Come on over and take a look, they said.

The family letters were breathtaking. Anne Brown had saved every letter her husband had ever written her. And since he wrote her as frequently as three times a day when he was away in Parliament, the correspondence was vast.

And it was informative. Of all the correspondence I know, a man's letters to his wife and *vice versa* will usually tell you more about him and his life than any other. Brown spared nothing. His whole energy, power, his delight in his marriage, his tremendous exuberance of spirit, were there in those letters, exclamation marks and all:

Quebec, Thursday, Oct. 27, 1864

My dearest Anne,

All right!!! Conference through at six o'clock this evening – Constitution adopted – a most creditable document – a complete reform of all the abuses & injustice we have complained of!! Is it not wonderful? French Canadianism entirely extinguished! I have only a moment to write you as I am just starting for Montreal [.] they are crying to me to hurry and my baggage is down. There they are again! You will say that our Constitution is dreadfully Tory – & so it is – but we have the power in our hands (if it passes) to change it as we like! Hurrah – . . .

By the time Careless had worked through these letters a new Brown emerged, warm, passionate, uxorious. Mackenzie had carefully left out all personal references when he had printed some of those letters in 1883. There were even Mackenzie's pencil marks on the letters to show the printer what should be included and what left out.

It is extraordinary how many things happen in this world not by deliberate

intention. Deliberateness indeed, there is, but it has a way of being shifted sideways by sheer accidents of circumstance. Lenin, it is true, got back to Russia from Switzerland in April, 1917, and successfully staged the Russian Revolution, but that in itself owed nothing to Lenin or to the little Russian colony of revolutionaries that whiled away a long exile in Zurich. It was the sheer chance that someone in the German government decided Lenin might usefully make trouble in Russia, and made the right moves at the right time. A good case can be made for the position that the Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo on Sunday, June 28, 1914, because Gavrilo Princip, the man who shot him, decided to have a cup of coffee. Bismarck did not plan the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War; like most effective statesmen he used his opportunities as they came along. The German breakthrough in the Ardennes in May, 1940 was not because the German General Staff planned it that way. Hitler happened to chance upon a report from a junior staff officer on possibilities of such a move, and forced it upon the General Staff.

I need not tell this audience that there is precious little research, in history at least, that goes in a straight line. Animal paths in the forest are the first analogy that occurred to me; you move from one to another, as the terrain allows. But in that analogy you know roughly where you want to end up; with research you often do not know where you will end up. Or you may know when you start, but what you end with can be entirely different. When I was an M.A. student at the University of British Columbia, Margaret Ormsby suggested I might do an M.A. thesis on some aspect of American political influences on the structure of Canadian Confederation. I was interested in political theory, and had done some work in it. All the secondary sources pointed the right way, and I was beginning to look at articles in 19th century periodicals, notably English and American ones, for their reflections on it all. These were rather thin and unsatisfactory. Canadian periodicals existed, but they were not very numerous. The thesis began to develop into a kind of reflective essay in comparative political theory. Then a colleague suggested that I might have a quick look at the Canadian newspapers to check the validity of my argument. I did not expect to find much. I don't know why I did not. Sheer ignorance, I suppose.

I remember going down to the Ontario Archives hunting up the *Globe* in the old Legislative Library. I got out the file for July-December, 1864, and opened it up at random. To my surprise, the very first page I opened had an editorial on the form and shape Confederation should take. Isolated luck, surely. But no: the *Globe* fairly bulged with editorials, letters, speeches, every day of every week throughout that summer and fall. But, according to the set of my ideas, the editorials did not go the right way. They were about the dangerous tendencies inherent in the American example. These the Civil War had revealed, and Canada's federation might usefully avoid these. Indeed, it soon became obvious from the *Globe's* position (which turned out to be more pro-American than most papers), that other newspapers were saying that federation was far too dangerous an example even to be considered by British North America in setting up *her* constitution.

Before an hour was out, it was perfectly clear that the thesis I had in mind on American influences on Canadian Confederation was blown to the winds. One could not, I felt, write a thesis satisfactorily on a negative subject. To

turn the whole thing inside out, to shift one's whole orientation, in the face of such massive evidence, was almost instantaneous. The thesis then became a study of Canadian political ideas and the way in which Canadian experience within Canada, and within a colonial system, had shaped the development of such ideas, and how sharp were the prejudices that Canadians had against the American system of government. This new topic came gradually to be immensely satisfying. The more weight of research was brought to bear on the topic the solidier it became.

Then the hunt began. It did not take long to exhaust the Ontario Archives, not in those days at any rate. The Parliamentary Library in Ottawa was a bigger bite, and by the time I had finished that I had an M. A. thesis on the political ideas in the Province of Canada. But by now it was clear that this was just a starting point. There was all the rest of British North America. There were about 375 newspapers in British North America, issued weekly or tri-weekly or daily, during those years between 1864 and 1867. I had covered perhaps a dozen in the Province of Canada. There was clearly a Ph.D. somewhere in all of this, if I could get it out. Before even tackling the Maritimes, I had to try to finish the Province of Canada. There were something over 200 newspapers missing.

Some of them turned up of course, at newspaper offices, or in local public libraries. The Stratford Public Library had files of the *Stratford Beacon*, one of the happiest finds, for it was exceptionally well written, and it had by far the most lively account of the final vote in the Confederation debates I had seen. It is 4:30 a.m. on Saturday, March 11, 1865, in the old Quebec City parliament buildings:

. . . the House broke forth into ringing cheers — not the customary Parliamentary plaudits, but loud and unmistakeable hurrahs,
The Frenchmen followed with one of their national songs, as the Speaker was leaving the chair, and the Englishmen succeeded with “God Save the Queen” — the whole loudly and wretchedly sung, just as it is customary to hear such things bawled forth at the fag end of a public dinner. The resemblance did not end here, for, as was to be expected, the House was in an unmistakeably seedy condition, having, as it was positively declared, eaten the saloon keeper clean out, drank him entirely dry, and got all the fitful naps of sleep that the benches along the passages could be made to yield. For who cared at one, two, three, and four in the morning, to sit in the House, to hear the stale talk of Mr. Ferguson, of South Simcoe, or to listen even to the polished and pointed sentences of Mr. Huntingdon? Men with the strongest constitutions for Parliamentary twaddle were sick of the debate, and the great bulk of the members were scattered about the building, with an up-all-night, get-tight-in-the morning air, impatient for the sound of the division bell. It rang at last, at quarter past four, and the jaded representatives of the people swarmed in to the discharge of the most important duty of all their lives. The galleries had been crowded up to midnight, and when the House adjourned, close upon the time when —

“Night’s candles had burnt out, and jocund morn
Stood smiling on the misty mountain’s top,”
away by Lake St. Charles — the neighbouring convent bell ringing the
hour of five as members were going to their lodgings — there yet remained
more spectators overhead than there were voters on the floor.

When I read that, it was too marvellous to resist. I took the file over to the young librarian at the Stratford library desk and said, “Isn’t that just gorgeous?” She deigned to read it, but she looked at me with sorrow and pity in her eyes. She may have thought I was trying to flirt with her, and had chosen a singularly inept way to go about it. I wasn’t. The *Stratford Beacon* had, (temporarily, I hope) rendered me oblivious to the charms of even young and attractive librarians. Than whom, I should add, there are few who present a more delicious, mysterious juxtaposition of innocence and knowing.

Belleville presented rather different problems. I had once lived in Belleville. There was a newspaper there that had been in existence for 125 years and more, and with luck the files should still be around. The old newspaper offices were. They were a series of ramshackle, run-together offices that backed onto the Moira river, a redoubtable stream that nourished countless cheese factories in its day, and still keeps Black Diamond, and Corby’s ancient distillery. The old newspaper office was the former stamping ground of a character nearly as ramshackle as the buildings, Sir Mackenzie Bowell, who had started in at the Belleville *Intelligencer* as a printer’s apprentice about 1837 or 1838, eventually became editor, then proprietor and died in 1917 about a decade before I came to live in Belleville. Where were the old files? At first no one in the newspaper office seemed to know, or even much to care. Then an editor remembered a shed on Pinnacle Street where the old files had been stored. The *Intelligencer* people evinced a curious reluctance to go there, but I persuaded them. It was a blistering hot day in late June. The shed was there all right, about 12 feet square, and 8 feet high, made of corrugated iron. At once, I understood their reluctance: it was dirty, cramped, indescribably messy, and the temperature inside was approaching that of a well-stoked furnace. The files were every which way. Before that day I had always thought that work in an ice house was about the hardest and messiest work imaginable, heavy, unwieldy, slippery, recalcitrant blocks of ice submerged in oceans of sawdust. But icehouse work has one preëminent virtue that will occur at once to the thoughtful listener: it is tolerably cool. I don’t need to tell this audience what newspaper files are like in those circumstances. And I needed particular files, not just any. There was no help for it but to plunge in. And eventually they emerged, one by one, those precious files for 1864, 1865, 1866 and 1867 together with some I never expected to find, those of the opposing Grit paper in Belleville, the *Hastings Chronicle*, that I had not even heard of before, and an additional set for a Kingston paper that I had never heard of either. It was immensely satisfying. I wrote the Ontario archivist at once, telling him about the files and for heaven’s sake to rescue them before they ended up on the town dump. I do not remember that he replied. The newspapers have however been microfilmed since, by the Canadian Library Association, and I trust the originals are now safe somewhere.

But in other towns it was a sadder story. Editors over the past forty years

seem to have had remarkable penchants for housecleaning, and there is no denying that newspaper files are messy and bulky. Sandfield Macdonald's *Cornwall Freeholder* probably went that way. There must have been something like 220 newspapers in Canada West in this period, and I succeeded in finding complete files (complete that is for 1864-7) for only 20. Other files have turned up since; even so, the destruction has been pretty terrible. The CLA with the help of Dr. J. J. Talman and others have done much in the past 20 years to rescue these newspapers from fire, dust, housecleaning editors, and from places like Pinnacle Street, Belleville.

The Maritime provinces, so much slower at adopting new fashions and cherishing an instinctive penchant for old things, have succeeded in hanging on to their files rather better. Of course they did not have so many newspapers to hang on to. Not every little place had two newspapers, one Grit and one Tory, as in Ontario. In the four Atlantic provinces I would estimate about 80, altogether. The proportion surviving was much better. Nearly all of the eleven newspapers in Halifax survived intact, as also the seven in Saint John. After I had been appointed to Dalhousie in the fall of 1951 I gradually made the rounds to Saint John, Fredericton, Charlottetown, St. John's and a few other places, to round out the British North American research on Confederation.

I learned about some characteristic Maritime attitudes. It can best be summed up as costiveness, a reluctance to say too much, or write too much, a reluctance characteristic of Maritime politicians, who, given their penchants and peccadilloes, may well be understandable. The best example of this Maritime political attitude I encountered in Fredericton. There was no New Brunswick archives in 1952; what archives there were in New Brunswick were either at U.N.B. or the Saint John Museum and the people there had been uniformly helpful. But the manuscript records of the government of New Brunswick were in an abyss of obscurity. I needed to see the Executive Council records for New Brunswick in the 1860's, and went to the office of the Clerk of the Council in Fredericton. He was, to put it mildly, uneasy. Why would anyone want to see the records of the New Brunswick Cabinet for the 1860's anyway? What would he do with them if they were lent to him? These seemed to be the questions that burdened his spirit. "Besides," he said, "I doubt if we have them. The records aren't in order." At length he swallowed his reluctance and took me to a steel-lined vault. It was clear the records weren't in order. On the upper shelves of the vault lay the records for the Executive Council of New Brunswick, starting from some point in the present indicative and stretching back into the past indefinite, imperfect subjunctive and several other tenses, I suspect, as yet undiscovered by grammar. He found a ladder and I climbed up on the upper shelves and found at least the volumes for 1865 and 1866, which was what I most needed. But it was not over yet. I was not allowed to be alone in a room with those Minutes. I was placed at a desk in a small room next to a stern lady typist, a lady whose proportions and physiognomy reminded me rather of Stephen Leacock's definition of a landlady, "a parallelogram square on all sides and equal to anything." She eyed me with suspicion. She looked with even more suspicion when I actually began to take notes.

Now one does not work long at New Brunswick history – or any other Atlantic province history for that matter – without discovering a beautiful

and not altogether unknown Maritime political art, refined by us here over the years to infinite subtleties and variations. It is called the art of patronage. It got fairly underway in Newfoundland in 1832, in New Brunswick in 1784, in Prince Edward Island in 1769, and in Nova Scotia about 1758. We in the Atlantic provinces have had about a two centuries' running start at the art of patronage. It is developed to a point that could make the most hardened central Canadian politician blanch. Even central Canadians, of course, have some experience in these matters. You remember in the great election in Missinabi County, when it began to appear that Edward Drone, the Independent candidate, was carrying the election:

Even Mr. Golgotha Gingham, the undertaker, came out and admitted that in working for John Henry Bagshaw [the Liberal candidate] he'd been going straight against his conscience . . . He said it had haunted him. Often at night when he would be working away quietly, one of these sudden misgivings would overcome him so that he could hardly go on with his embalming . . . The Conservatives said openly that they were sick of party, utterly done with it, and the Liberals said that they hated it. Already three or four of them had taken Drone aside and explained that what was needed in the town was a straight, clean, non-partisan post office, built on a piece of ground of a strictly non-partisan character . . . Two or three men were willing to show Drone just where a piece of this character could be bought.

So you would not expect me to have read very far in those New Brunswick Minutes of Council without encountering patronage. And sure enough, R. D. Wilmot, was threatening to resign from the Smith government because his cousin, L. A. Wilmot, was not made Chief Justice of New Brunswick. L. A. Wilmot had some claim, as senior judge on the New Brunswick Bench, but then he had supported Confederation, and the Smith government opposed it. So L. A. Wilmot was not appointed and R. D. Wilmot resigned. All of this was in the New Brunswick Minutes of Council, none too well concealed. I could not forbear an audible chuckle at R. D. Wilmot's machinations. The lady typist was *not* amused. She seemed ready to seize the book and me and return both of us to the vault. She looked daggers, and finally said disgustedly – I can still hear her – “I knew no good would come of lettin' the public in to them Minutes.”

In New Brunswick, of course, patronage cuts much deeper than mere Council Minutes. They get down to real essentials, like beer, for example.

Once upon a time there were two great breweries in New Brunswick; one was called Moosehead and the other Red Ball. Being good Maritime breweries they made campaign contributions to the government of the day, in this case to the Conservative government of New Brunswick, that of Hugh John Flemming. As to the beer, I always preferred Moosehead, myself, as the better of the two. Apparently the people of New Brunswick felt so; only 15% of beer sales were Red Ball. The Moosehead brewery thought so also, for they decided that their campaign contribution to the New Brunswick government need only be a fraction of that of Red Ball Brewery. The New Brunswick government thought this kind of discrimination not only unfair, but also unwise. They knew how to retaliate.

The edict went forth from Caesar, in this case the Liquor Commission of New Brunswick, that local beer in New Brunswick would be sold in the exact proportion of one Red Ball to two Moosehead. These proportions were to be applied monthly. There was not much doubt that the New Brunswick inhabitants broadly preferred Moosehead. The result was that for the last 10 days in each mortal month it was virtually impossible to buy any other local beer but Red Ball in the far-flung empire of the New Brunswick Liquor Commission.

Political patronage is one of the few things I can both loathe and enjoy. I find people's preoccupation with it occasionally sad, sometimes pathetic, but I am afraid too often an amusing comment on human nature and human government. Such is the correspondence about knighthoods in the papers of various prime ministers. Hope deferred maketh the heart sick. Senator William Miller (1835-1912) of Arichat, Cape Breton, seems to have lived with his expectations for a knighthood for years, from 1887 until he died, unknighthed, in February, 1912. He was a pretty sick man. Here is a letter to the Prime Minister, Sir John Thompson, two days after the Queen's Birthday, May 26, 1894. If ever Miller could hope for a knighthood, it was surely under the good offices of a Nova Scotian Prime Minister, whom he had been partly responsible for getting into Conservative politics in the first place:

I thought it possible — nay even probable, that I would have had some explanation from you in reference to the omission of my name from the list of "Birthday Honours" this year, after what you said and wrote to me on the subject this time last year. Evidently, however, the subject does not cause you any concern — much less anxiety [In July, 1892] I already felt that very little of your head, not to speak of your heart, was in the task you had undertaken I . . . have *finally* determined I shall put the subject out of the way of ever possibly being to me hereafter one either of suspense or disquietude. "The game is not worth the candle."

But with Miller the game always was. Until a couple of months ago I never knew what happened about that letter to Thompson. The answer turned up in a little collection of Miller papers in the Nova Scotia Archives. The very day the letter was received Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper was delegated by Thompson to go to Miller and explain how he had done his best.

The explanation was this. Knighthoods, I need hardly say, were a desperately serious and secretive business. At midnight, just before the Queen's Birthday, two carriages drove up to Sir John Thompson's house at the corner of Metcalfe and Cooper Streets, Ottawa. The Governor-General, Lord Aberdeen, got out and spent half an hour with the Prime Minister. The reason for this odd visit was to tell Sir John Thompson of the cable from London, that, *horribile dictu*, Miller's name had been omitted from the list for K.C.M.G. What was to be done? The Colonial Secretary was cabled; the Honours list came out a day late. And notwithstanding this high-placed intervention, on May 25th William Miller was still plain William Miller, as William Miller only too well knew. But all would be made right, if it were possible, Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper said to him reassuringly. Later on that year, in the autumn of 1894, Sir John Thompson

and Miller met at Antigonish, and the Prime Minister said that at the very least Miller would be made Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia when the present incumbent's term was up, as it would be in 1895; and in the meantime, the knighthood would be pressed forward for the birthday honours of 1895. But alas! The best laid plans gae aft alee. Sir John Thompson died two months afterward, in December, 1894. The Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia, who rejoiced in the name of Malachy Bowes Daly, duly came to the end of his term in 1895. But he was thereupon *reappointed* promptly for another term. And *he* got his K.C.M.G. in 1900. Meanwhile the torch of Miller's knighthood was passed to Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper. Young Tupper had got his K.C.M.G. in 1893 at the age of 38; but he was by no means so enamoured of having Miller as a fellow knight as Thompson had been. So 1895 went by. When Laurier came to power in 1896, nothing much could be done. I would now love to know if the Sir Robert Borden papers (Borden, you remember, was the Nova Scotian who became Prime Minister in October, 1911) contain further letters from Seantor William Miller on the subject of that long overdue knighthood.

Perhaps if Senator Miller had been given his knighthood we should not have had the correspondence on the subject we do. In some Maritime provinces knights, Sir Frederick Borden, Sir Charles Tupper, the knighthoods seem to have had the effect of making them want to cover up the pressures, and the peccadilloes, that preceded and followed that precious "Sir." Tupper was known in the county across the celebrated Missaguash river, (the boundary between New Brunswick and Nova Scotia) as "the ram of Cumberland County." I have found only a little evidence to back up this sturdy sobriquet, and oral tradition in matters such as these is notoriously treacherous. My information is, however, that Tupper's adventures on the Intercolonial Railway between Amherst and Ottawa had become sufficiently well known in government circles that a porter was assigned to watch Sir Charles' compartment to see that he did not get himself or the government into trouble. On getting off the train in Montreal, Sir Charles turned to the porter, thanked him for his attention, and added, "You were watching my compartment all right, but you forgot to watch the lady's." Some other knights, like Sir Charles G. D. Roberts, discovered that the "Sir" may well have opened green, rich delicious vistas of opportunity. As I have the story (it is second-hand), when Sir Charles G. D. Roberts was knighted by the R. B. Bennett government in 1934, a wealthy Hamilton matron threw an elaborate dinner party for Sir Charles and his brother Theodore. A week before the dinner the maid took sick, and a substitute was hired and carefully trained for the august occasion. The dinner began with the new maid bringing in a tureen a soup. She was young and pretty and not too thin. As she was passing Sir Charles' chair, she gave a little scream and dropped the soup. The mistress of the house was appalled and at once upbraided her. The maid stood her ground, pointed her finger at Sir Charles, and exclaimed, "He pinched me!" Theodore Roberts then said helpfully, from across the table, "Yes, he did. I saw him do it."

I hope that story is true. My source is a good one. But stories are a dangerous habit, for one is led insensibly into stories one wishes were true but probably aren't. Without truth history becomes a tale and a fable. It too often is. This, it seems to me, is the first duty of the historian to his readers and to his students;

to be dissatisfied with half-truth. That is all that one may find. But one ought to be dissatisfied with it. I put much weight on newspaper editorials in *The life and times of Confederation*. Aside from even the question of their accuracy, I now wonder how many people read those editorials besides myself. In the account I quoted you of the last hours of the Confederation debate I wonder if the newspaper correspondent of the *Stratford Beacon* was telling the truth or embellishing it. It has the ring of authenticity about it, but having said that, one has said all that can be safely said. There is of course no answer to questions like this. We can only try. But the trying is everything.

One has always to put history into the reality from which it came. For it did come from a reality. No one ought ever to forget that. Sir John A. Macdonald lived; such is the magic of history that in a real sense he lives still. But *you* know. There are his letters; there is that neat, flowing handwriting. There are George Brown's exclamation marks; even the vigorous way he put pen to them betrays the man. History is a vast range of characters. Some of them, if they walked into this room right now would impress you. Others you would dislike.

This is the point perhaps where one can begin to write, when you can begin to hear men talk, when the often unspoken ways of thinking and doing in a society begin to creep around your mind. Here the secret lies in the little things, a phrase, a sentence, even an adjective here and there that betrays a whole way of thinking. That is one reason why I believe it is difficult to use assistants in historical research. Unless the work be mechanical, you have to do the research yourself. No one else can really read the documents for you. I had an assistant once who read some of the *Toronto Globe* for me for a recent book. I was in no position to check his research. By chance I discovered from another source about a really important letter of Edward Blake's in the *Globe* that he had just passed by. I had never used assistants before, and have never used them since. No one knows but you, the writer, what is to be looked for.

I am not going to say much about writing. It's an art and everyone has his own methods. It is not, in any case, the conversion of a set of notes into prose. Matter can be carried, and in a graceful and readable way, but it has to be carried by the mind not by the archives. Even then the reader needs to be taken up upon a hilltop every once in a while and shown the view of the landscape around. But whatever else, writing is not easy; and there is no end to improvement of it. Recently a lady editor for the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* sent me back the manuscript of a short article (about 1700 words) on Sir John Thompson's father. I had done at least six drafts of it before it went in. It had been read by two colleagues. I had thought it immaculate, even, I flattered myself, elegant. *DCB* thought it was a little too long, and needed tightening. They proceeded to do it. They cut 200 words from it, sacrificed little or nothing, and the whole article was tightened up and made good. The experience proves again the old dictum of Sheridan's, "Easy writing is curs'd hard reading."

There is one final dimension to all of this. Not only can history be written and read, but in a profound, emotional sense, it can be seen and felt. History has to be walked and touched. I don't see how one can write about the fur trade without having lived for a while with a canoe and a packsack in the woods and rivers. One should not write about the Saskatchewan rebellion of 1885 without having been to Saskatchewan, without having seen Batoche. I think

history has to get right inside one's experience. I remember one May evening walking down from the old deserted acropolis above Corinth. There had been no one there all day. My only company was Baedeker, which bulged a back pocket. The sun was setting over the hills across the Gulf of Corinth, somewhere behind Delphi. The goats were coming home, the bells jangling the clear, calm evening air. The last harvesters of the winter wheat were finishing and starting home too. Silhouetted against the sea, were the ruined pillars of the temple of Apollo. There lay Corinthian history, its economy, its pride, its achievements, and its fall to Roman power in 146 B.C. The evening seemed to have the quality of timelessness, as if nothing had changed across the eighty or so fathers and sons that separated me from the Corinthians. Here is history manifest before one's eyes. Thus to sit in the morning sun on the Palatine Hill, or walk across the Northumberland moorland along the Roman Wall, or listen to Mozart in a Salzburg garden: this is the highest and greatest history, a conjunction of mind and sense that sweeps all before it. It is a kind of glory, as if mere man had for a little while been touched by the gods, by music or joy, or both, a triumph like Beethoven's in the 9th symphony. A Canadian thinks of Lampman's triumph, his celebration of the ancient river of Canada, as he stood at Les Eboulements, one evening at sunset, looking southwards across the St. Lawrence:

Broad shadows fall. On all the mountain side
The scythe-swept fields are silent. Slowly home
By the long beach the high-piled hay-carts come,
Splashing the pale salt shallows. Over wide
Fawn-coloured wastes of mud the slipping tide,
Round the dun rocks and wattled fisheries,
Creeps murmuring in. And now by twos and threes,
O'er the slow spreading pools with clamorous chide,
Belated crows from strip to strip take flight.
Soon will the first star shine; yet ere the night
Reach onward to the pale-green distances,
The sun's last shaft beyond the gray sea-floor
Still dreams upon the Kamouraska shore,
And the long line of golden villages.

PETER B. WAITE