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Reviewer

Book Review

Reviewed Work: *Time and a Place: An Environmental History of Prince Edward Island*, by Edward MacDonald, Joshua MacFadyen, and Irené Novaczek (eds.).

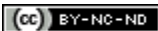
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Review:

Edward MacDonald, Joshua MacFadyen and Irené Novaczek (eds.), *Time and a Place: An Environmental History of Prince Edward Island* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press; Charlottetown: Island Studies Press, 2016). xv + 460pp. Paper \$34.95

Ray Côté

MIRCS Review #2017-02

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As an interested visitor to Prince Edward Island during the last five decades, I thought I knew quite a bit about the island and its history. After reading this book, however, I now know that this was not the case. *Time and A Place: An Environmental History of Prince Edward Island* explores the interaction of humanity, geography and environment on that small island in the Northumberland Strait, and contains a wealth of historical information including over one hundred pages of appendices, notes, references, and bibliography.

The book derives from a 2010 conference titled "Time and a Place: Environmental Histories, Environmental Futures and Prince Edward Island." The fourteen authors invited to contribute chapters are knowledgeable and have extensive academic experience in relevant fields of study. Topics covered include geological history, forests, agriculture, wildlife, fisheries, tourism and energy. When many of us think of environmental perspectives, we tend to begin with the late 1960s and early 1970s. This book appropriately reminds us that the history of the environment, which has greatly shaped Prince Edward Island, begins long before that.

A central theme throughout the book is that of limits and boundaries, which are perhaps more readily explored in islands than anywhere else. Additionally, the inter-connectedness, especially between the land and the sea at the littoral zone, is clearly evident. Islands such as PEI are particularly effective as case studies and experiments in sustainable development because of the geographic proximity and the inter-relationships which occur there. Yet critically, as Joshua MacFadyen notes in his chapter on agricultural land use, “terms such as traditional, sustainable and self-sufficient would have meant different things in different times and on different parts of the Island.” Hence the value of an environmental history.

Interestingly, the Epilogue seems to suggest an inward looking and protectionist philosophy but it recognizes that “islands are interconnected by historical pathways and contemporary vulnerabilities.” The reality, of course, is that no island is entirely self-contained. This is perhaps more evident today with the threat of climate change which might put islands, especially low-lying ones and those with particular geologies, at greater risk.

As with any book, a reviewer always has a few criticisms. Firstly, the volume would have benefited from a chapter on transportation and its impact over time on both society and the natural environment given that PEI has a greater percentage of paved roads than other provinces (it is only addressed to a limited degree in the energy chapter). Secondly, the book gives the Comprehensive Development Plan of 1969 inordinate mention without really providing a clear explanation of the achievements of the plan. Thirdly, the chapter devoted to tourism is more about the promotional materials published than the impact of tourism activities and establishments. Finally, the rationale for the choice of time periods for chapters was not always clear. Some of the periods described are from 1720-1900, 1861-1971 and 1969-2014.

As one might expect in any edited collection, the writing and vocabulary (look for the word “palimpsest”) varies considerably, but

is largely of high quality. Although many of the figures would have benefitted from a full page size, generally the editing is excellent.

Ultimately, *Time and A Place: An Environmental History of Prince Edward Island* will be of interest to students of environmental history, environmental studies, geography, sociology, political science and island studies. This is a scholarly volume but the general reader with an abiding interest in this red mud island will absorb a good deal of history from the book. Others interested in islands generally will learn about the challenges and opportunities as they presented themselves over time.

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Raymond Côté is Professor Emeritus in Resource and Environmental Studies at Dalhousie University. Prior to joining Dalhousie he was a Senior Regional Manager with Environment Canada. In both capacities, he has been involved with programs and projects in Prince Edward Island. He has more than forty-five years experience in environmental management as a researcher, teacher, policy advisor, consultant and activist.