



PROJECT MUSE®

---

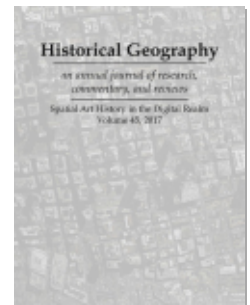
## Thirty Years After: Some Unsettled Business on the Academic Frontier of Historical Geography in Canada

Frank Tough

Historical Geography, Volume 45, 2017, pp. 129-136 (Article)

Published by University of Nebraska Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/hgo.2017.0008>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/716024>

development: Indigenous, French, and English Canada.<sup>3</sup> This project will help in planning the way ahead. Change in Canada will require broad public knowledge and support. Maps help clarify thinking. An atlas such as this, clearly presented and accessible as a public document, will help in planning the way ahead.

I conclude with a heartening note. On June 9, 2017, just after this symposium was held, the Royal Canadian Geographical Society announced a new educational project, *The Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada*. The atlas content will be produced by the RCGS in partnership with the Assembly of First Nations, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the Métis National Council, the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, and Indspire. The atlas and accompanying educational resource material will be funded by the Government of Canada to mark Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Confederation, and will be available in 2018 to all Indigenous schools and to over 19,000 Canadian Geographic Education members, and to the general public. This cooperative project should offer some useful leads on how to proceed.

## NOTES

1. Susan Schulten, *Mapping the Nation, History and Cartography in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2012), 120.
2. *Atlas Syria* (Vienna, Republic of Austria, Federal Ministry of the Interior, Federal Ministry of Defence and Sport 2015), 5-6.
3. Peter Russell, *Canada's Odyssey: A Country Based on Incomplete Conquests* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2017).



## Thirty Years After: Some Unsettled Business on the Academic Frontier of Historical Geography in Canada

Frank Tough

Department of Native Studies  
University of Alberta

*"We have not yet realized that the Indian and his culture were fundamental to the growth of Canadian institutions"* (Harold A. Innis, 1930).<sup>1</sup>

The three volumes of the *Historical Atlas of Canada* (HAC) are a remarkable scholarly feat. Accordingly, this atlas received much international recognition and praise; in Alan Baker's appraisal: "The Historical Atlas of Canada stands as one the major achievements of Western historical geography during the twentieth century."<sup>2</sup> Similarly, D.W. Meinig positively assessed the first volume: "The work is breathtaking; in the care and beauty of its production, the range and detail of its coverage, the depth of its scholarship."<sup>3</sup> A broader assessment of the atlas was provided by Anne B. Piternick:

The Atlas was a pioneering research project in two senses. It was pioneering in its multidisciplinary scope and in the number of people involved from across the country. But it was also pioneering in that the results of their research were

presented in non-traditional cartographic form. Presentation in this form made the results of scholarly research accessible to a wide audience, provided new material for teaching purposes, and made many people aware of the value of thinking in spatial terms.<sup>4</sup>

Both the process and product were exhaustive outcomes of a bold, enthusiastic plan. For a history of the project, in particular the day-to-day and structural challenges, as well as, some careful metrics of the atlas' contents, Piternick's work should be consulted.<sup>5</sup>

By and large, the atlas captured several dynamic dimensions of the scholarly productivity of the 1970s and 1980s, but the formal dedication to Harold Adams Innis and Andrew Hill Clarke in volume 1 reflected uniquely Canadian intellectual history and thought. The atlas, as we would imagine any atlas should be, is overwhelmingly empirical. Massive amounts of facts are coherently presented as maps, diagrams and statistical graphs. Close examination of all corners of a typical plate is bound to reveal data nuggets divulging some little-known aspect of our past.

In my view, the enduring strengths include:

1. well-developed frameworks that paid respect to foundations laid by Innis and Clarke;
2. strong, coherent cartographic presentation based on tradition and skills;
3. innovative and flexible design engaging multiple scales (national + local);
4. predominance of primary, empirically-based, research;
5. an appropriate mix of qualitative and quantitative data sources;
6. regional balances (center:periphery; urban:rural), and
7. diverse disciplinary expertise and content.

Because *HAC* provides a scholarly interpretation of the development of the country, one that I think is still valid in most respects, the atlas is more than a reliable reference source. Still, it conveys the sort of basic information that might be sought from a traditional atlas. Space does not permit elaborating upon these qualities; instead my comments will focus on: (1) some select observations as an historical geographer; and (2) the Aboriginal content based on experience gained in Native Studies.

Overall, the atlas falls short on considering an enduring contradiction facing Canadian society: contemporary Aboriginal peoples contending with colonial structures that evolved and deepened overtime. This contradiction is often expressed in terms of land and resources. In other words, the *HAC* failed to sense what was occurring at the time and to anticipate the future significance. Until most recently, Aboriginal Canada has been something of an intellectual *terra incognita* for the field of geography, but this complacent innocence means that this *tabula rasa* can still be filled with out, in part, by avoiding the mistakes that characterized other disciplines, but more importantly, by offering specifically geographical expertise.<sup>6</sup>

We need not reiterate critiques concerning the role of national atlases as heroic expressions of nation-building, Finland and Canada being the first to attempt to fill such a need. The broad intent of the project was nicely stated in volume 1 by William G. Dean: "The *Historical Atlas of Canada* offers a deliberately moulded visual approach to the Canadian past, with emphasis on the processes of social and economic change."<sup>7</sup> For those that spend any time in the archives, Dominion Archivist Jean-Pierre Wallot's introductory remark in volume 1: "As matter of fact the lacunae in our knowledge and sources have been enormous," is a proven understatement.<sup>8</sup> The atlas afforded an opportunity to engage more intensely and extensively with a variety of archival records, and in fact, a necessary quantitative approach to the records produced exciting contrasts to established history based on narrow range of official sources. As such, the *HAC* is not an expression of some one-dimensional national chauvinism. With strong social historical foundations, especially in volume 3, many of the crude narrative views, that tend to serve elite interests, are negated. In fact, the elites that emerge from this national building process come

under some exposure. To illustrate, by pinpointing Toronto law offices and bank headquarters, Gunter Gad and Deryck Holdsworth revealed the emergence of an urban corporate land use at a discernable scale that anyone could appreciate (volume 3, plate 15). A perusal of the three volumes could not leave the impression that the triumphs of the ruling economic, political and legal Canadian elites have been recognized. In fact, many groups outside of the usual centres of authority (e.g., workers, primary producers, immigrants, etc.) really emerge forcefully onto the landscape through the atlas findings. Discussions concerning nation-building should demonstrate empirically that such processes have cultural, social, and economic costs. The content of the *HAC* can be seen as a reality check on banal social-political discourse associated with national identity claims.

Unlike many previous Canadian atlases with a single base map and a regimented static appearance,<sup>9</sup> the atlas design showed a nice mixture of base maps that ranged from a close-up view of urban neighborhoods to the entire nation. Such scale flexibility created a content balance between urban and rural, centre and periphery. As an undergraduate, I was taught that cartography is both an art and science, and this atlas captures both dimensions of effective map communication extremely well. Few commentators on the *HAC* have not failed to notice its cartography demonstrated extremely effective design that overcame challenges of vast data sets, new concepts, and multiple authors. This solid cartographic design succeeded at promoting a convergence of desperate academic traditions (archaeology, history, demography, economics and geography) into a coherent representation. The disciplinary pluralism provides both depth and breadth. On the whole, the *HAC* pragmatically addressed the often elusive quest for interdisciplinary activity.

The project emerged at a time when dealing with large data sets could be approached by the earliest “desk top” spreadsheets, but thankfully, before the mechanical dominance of soulless GIS products.<sup>10</sup> In the *HAC*, demographic data is not just large aggregate generalizations, but specific insights concerning particular social groups are offered. For example, changes in Montreal population density between 1842-1901 realistically demonstrates urbanization (volume 2, plate 49). Daniel J. Hiebert’s “Winnipeg: A Divided City” maps out variables of ethnicity and class following the 1919 strike; but what caught my eye was a small inset map displaying “Deaths from Pneumonia and Influenza November 1918.” Vastly different outcomes depended upon the neighborhood you resided in (volume 3, plate 31).<sup>11</sup> As someone from the peripheral prairies, I remain fascinated by what lies to the east of the center: the plates on Acadians (volume 1, plates 29 and 30), the Atlantic fisheries (volume 2, plate 37), or the seigneurial system (volume 1, plate 53; volume 2, plate 13). Where else can readers visualize strike and lockouts, union membership, unemployment relief camps, or what actually constituted welfare during the Depression? Fortunately, what might seem like random, particularistic micro-social histories are nested within the overall patterns of economic structures and demographic change. This capacity separates an atlas from a set of maps, and it reveals what is missed by the information fragments of cyberspace.

While the *HAC* reflected the existing strengths of Canadian historical geography, and it significantly augmented the existing published research, some important gaps are plainly evident. Prairie historical geography has long focused on multiculturalism and some spatial characteristics of agrarian settlement. Today, a plate on the prairies titled “Peopling the Land” would spark censure because the grasslands and parklands had long been peopled before the *Dominion Lands Act* regime. “Peopling the Land” therefore has a colonial ring to it. More fundamentally however, geographers should venture beyond the sudden appearance of homestead regulations by considering questionable surrenders of Indian reserve lands or the fraudulent use of Métis scrip to obtain homestead patents. How did land markets develop where none had previously existed? Similarly, a plate depicting “Land development in Edmonton” provides an inset map of

the Garneau neighborhood (adjacent to the University of Alberta). It is not a surprise that only a few of those that have long lived or worked in this university community are aware that Laurent Garneau was a Métis man who had come under state scrutiny in 1885 and had once possessed an Edmonton river lot (volume 3, plate 20). What is of interest here is that toponymy preserved Garneau as person through an official, recognized neighborhood name while simultaneously removing him from memory.

In the post fur-trade era, Aboriginal engagement with seasonal labour markets required by frontier resource capitalism constituted a continuing contribution to our economic history. For example, First Nation women supplied much needed skilled labour for British Columbia's salmon canning industry. It seems the Aboriginal content problem manifests in at least two forms: (1) themes and plates that inadvertently marginalize Aboriginal Canada; and (2) a marked absence of plates with focused Aboriginal content.

Clearly, the content that would be of interest to Aboriginal readers declines precipitously. Volume 1 contributes to the historical geography of Aboriginal Canada in three important ways: (1) years of archaeology field work were synthesized into national and regional maps; (2) a vast Hudson's Bay Company archival record was deployed to illustrate the fur trade in a new manner; and (3) Conrad Heidenreich's (and the occasional co-author) reconstruction of the inland (French) expansion into the Great Lakes Basin (volume 1, plates 34-41). His multiple temporal cross sections (1615 to 1755) allow the reader to understand the spatial interconnections of trade, disease, war, and migration. This set of plates is an account of European expansion built upon disruptions and dislocation to the numerous First Nations around the Great Lakes at the heart of Turtle Island. It represents an empirical project that attempted, with the highest degree of possible accuracy, to discern the location of specific villages/bands and nations in order to trace their circumstances and interactions over a century and a half. Volume 1 closes with a most significant, but easily overlooked, dramatic historical cross section: "Native Canada, ca. 1820," by Heidenreich and Galois, which depicts populations, seasonal movements, linguistic families, and the extent of economic disruption ensuing from contact with Europe (volume 1, plate 69). This plate should have served as a model for an account of Native Canada at other points in time and for periods in which data sources were far more robust.<sup>12</sup> In terms of the Aboriginal and fur trade content, volume 1 reflects closely the available scholarly expertise that could tackle the pre-1891 period: the ethnohistorian Bruce Trigger, and historical geographers Harris, Heidenreich, Kaye, Moodie, Ray, Ruggles, and the young Victor Lytwyn. In many respects, their plates filled gaps left, but understood by Harold Innis.

Unfortunately, what was a solid start based on intense primary research and proven expertise did not set a trend, unintentionally the atlas replicates the "Disappearing Indian" narrative (Table 1). Meinig's review of volume 3 correctly observed: "Indians and Inuit seem to disappear from view ..."<sup>13</sup> Volume 2 is not entirely devoid of important Aboriginal content, yet one cannot help but think that First Nations and the Métis are marginal and irrelevant, non-participants. Only two plates bring the fur trade into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Désy and Castel painstakingly compiled information concerning "Native" reserves in Eastern and Western Canada. Reserves depicted to scale on regional maps (volume 2, plates 32, 33 and 34). While these plates remain a useful reference source, the vital issues of treaty negotiations and reserve surrenders could not but get a mention.<sup>14</sup> In a certain sense, plates 32-34 unintentionally communicate an error of the reserve as a residual of a long-concluded treaty process, a deal now complete. Many cartographic possibilities exist if the northern and prairie treaties of the old Hudson's Bay Company territory are conceived as something more than the establishment of good title for the settler, but rather, a continuing relationship with the Crown and ongoing interest in lands.

Contrary to this deficiency, plates dedicated to the Métis ("the forgotten people") are welcomed. In a packed plate, Kaye, Moodie, and Sprague captured the explosive demography



**Table 1:** Aboriginal Content of the *Historical Atlas of Canada*, Volume 1

<b>Aboriginal Related Content, Volume 1</b>	<b>Plate Number</b>	<b>Amount of Content</b>
The Last Ice Sheets, 18000-10000 BC	1	1
The Fluted Point People, 9500-8200 BC	2	1
Southern Ontario, 8600 BC	3	1
Environmental Change After 9000 BC	4	1
The Plano People, 8500-6000 BC	5	1
Cultural Sequences, 8000-4000 BC	6	1
Cultural Sequences, 4000-1000 BC	7	1
Cultural Sequences, 1000 BC - AD 500	8	1
Cultural Sequences, AD 500-European Contact	9	1
Bison Hunters of the Plains	10	1
Peopling the Arctic	11	1
Iroquoian Agricultural Settlement	12	1
The Coast Tsimshian, ca 1750	13	1
Prehistoric Trade	14	1
Cosmology	15	1
Population and Subsistence	18	1
The Atlantic Realm	20	0.2
The St. Lawrence Valley, 16th Century	33	1
Settlements and Missionaries, 1615-1650	34	1
The Great Lakes Basin, 1600-1653	35	1
Re-Establishment of Trade, 1654-1666	37	1
Expansion of French Trade, 1667-1696	38	1
Trade and Empire, 1697-1739	39	1
France Secures the Interior, 1740-1755	40	1
Indian War and American Invasion	44	0.2
Native Resettlement, 1635-1800	47	1
Rupert's Lane	57	1
Indian Maps	59	1
Bayside Trade, 1720-1780	60	1
Competition and Consolidation, 1760-1825	61	1
Trading Posts, 1774-1821	62	1
Transportation in the Petit Nord	63	1
Fur Trade Settlements	64	1
Peoples of the Boreal Forest and Parkland	65	1
New Caledonia and Columbia	66	1
Eastern Canada in 1800	68	0.3
Native Canada, ca. 1820	69	1
<b>Total Aboriginal Content on Plates in Volume 1</b>		<b>34.7</b>
<b>Total Number of Plates in Volume 1</b>		<b>69</b>
<b>Aboriginal Content as a Percentage of Total Plates, Volume 1</b>		<b>50.29%</b>

**Table 2:** Aboriginal Content of the *Historical Atlas of Canada*, Volume 2

<b>Aboriginal Related Content, Volume 2</b>	<b>Plate Number</b>	<b>Amount of Content</b>
Eastern Canada, ca. 1800	4	0.1
Canada in 1891*	5	0.5
The Coming of the Loyalists	7	0.1
The Fur Trade to the Northwest to 1870	17	1
The Red River Settlement	18	1
The Fur Trade in the Cordillera to 1857	19	1
Native Reserves of Eastern Canada to 1900	32	1
Native Reserves: Names and Descriptions	33	1
Native Reserves of Western Canada to 1900	34	1
Dispersal of the Manitoba Métis and the Northern Western Rebellion, 1870-1885	35	1
The Gold Rushes in British Columbia, 1858-1881	36	0.25
Defining sacred space	53	0.1
<b>Total Aboriginal Content on Plates in Volume 2</b>		<b>8.05</b>
<b>Total Number of Plates in Volume 2</b>		<b>58</b>
<b>Aboriginal Content as a Percentage of Total Plates, Volume 2</b>		<b>13.88%</b>

\*identical plates

**Table 3:** Aboriginal Content of the *Historical Atlas of Canada*, Volume 3

<b>Aboriginal Related Content, Volume 3</b>	<b>Plate Number</b>	<b>Amount of Content</b>
Canada in 1891*	1	0.5
Territorial Evolution	2	0.25
Population Composition	4	0.05
Resource Communities in British Columbia	22	0.05
Schooling and Social Structure	33	0.25
Societies and Economies in the North	58	1
<b>Total Aboriginal Content on Plates in Volume 3</b>		<b>2.1</b>
<b>Total Number of Plates in Volume 3</b>		<b>66</b>
<b>Aboriginal Content as a Percentage of Total Plates, Volume 3</b>		<b>3.18%</b>

\*identical plates

and mixed land uses of “The Red River Settlement,” a predominantly Métis society (volume 2, plate 18). The plate reconstructs a seasonal round of activities and maps indicate a variety of land uses (hunting trails, agriculture, fishing, goose hunting, and sugaring). By challenging empirically an outdated narrative concerning Canada’s implementation of a land grant intended for the Manitoba Métis, social historian Sprague’s corrective to Canadian history is a contribution that is seldom appreciated. Yet he gave these Métis claims an intellectual and empirical credibility. Sadly, this material has been overlooked. To illustrate, a long-running and complicated legal action on behalf of the Métis of Manitoba, which sought a declaration concerning the failure of the Crown to implement the large grant provided by Section 31 of the *Manitoba Act, 1870*, was

finally settled by the Supreme Court of Canada (*The Manitoba Metis Federation Inc. v. Canada [Attorney General]*) in 2013. An important cornerstone of the plaintiffs' case required establishing "Indian Title" for the Métis. Comfortable with the "Indian Title" reference in the plain text of Section 31, the plaintiffs declined to provide cogent evidence or any expertise in court that the Métis of the Red River Country used and occupied land in what became the Province of Manitoba. In contrast, the Crown's experts effectively created a sense of individualistic land use (long river lots) by the Métis. However, plate 18 by Kaye, Moodie, and Sprague provides considerable evidence of near exclusive Métis occupancy and use of land and resources (Indian title by possession). In other words, the deficiency in the case underscored by the Supreme Court was not a problem of historical fact. It would seem then, that the plaintiffs failed to establish a valid claim to "Indian Title" which in turn eroded the case for a neglected fiduciary responsibility by the federal government.

So our understanding of the land transformed is incomplete and future efforts will need to acknowledge, with empirical precision, that transforming the land entailed displacement of the original populations, notwithstanding their engagement with the commercial impulses of Europe. Nonetheless, I am forced to ponder, how is it that so many distinct "marginal" populations were rescued from the obscurity of official history, while at the same time, the original peoples remained largely unnoticed.

As a Winnipegger, I cannot help but think that the emerging Native land struggles of the 1970s (e.g., Nisga'a assertion of Indian title [*R. v. Calder*], the Dene Nation's resolute opposition to extractive industrial development and the ensuing Mackenzie Valley Pipeline commission of inquiry by Justice Berger, and the James Bay Cree's successful out maneuvering of the overly confident Quebec state, along with political agitation for constitutionally recognized rights) were momentous events that were congruent with the planning of the atlas project, but yet too remote from the Toronto annex. These struggles, a national geographical crisis, illustrate wonderfully that resistance and change originate in the periphery. The centre could not anticipate the demands for a geographical reset. Nevertheless, the post-HAC historical geography of Aboriginal Canada has been encouraging.

Looking at Daniel Hiebert's Winnipeg, I must ask: would the vastly different impacts of the 1918 influenza epidemic for Winnipeg neighborhoods have occurred with a secure access to medical treatment and better living standards? The atlas affords many Canadians the prospect of looking back to appreciate what has been achieved, what needs to be protected, but also, what yet needed to be discovered. If looking back through the lens of the Historical Atlas of Canada is not convincing, then try looking south.

## NOTES

1. Harold A. Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999 [1930]), 392.
2. Alan R.H. Baker, *Geography and History: Bridging the Divide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 203.
3. D.W. Meinig, "The Historical Geography Imperative," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 79 (1989): 82.
4. Anne B. Piternick, "The Historical Atlas of Canada/The Project Behind the Project," *Cartographica* 30 (1993): 28.
5. For readers interested in atlas projects and the history of the *Historical Atlas of Canada* in particular see, Anne B. Piternick, "Author Problems in Collaborative Research Project," *Scholarly Publishing* (1993): 22-37; and Anne B. Piternick, "The Making of a Scholarly



- Research Atlas," *Reference Services Review* (1994): 45-55. I appreciate Skip Ray bringing these sources to my attention.
6. For geographical expertise applied to Aboriginal struggles, see the following Wiley Lectures: Peter J. Usher, "Environment, Race and Nation Reconsidered: Reflections on Aboriginal Land Claims in Canada," *Canadian Geographer* 47 (2003): 365-382; and Arthur J. Ray, "Ethnohistorical Geography and Aboriginal Rights Litigation in Canada: Memoir of an Expert Witness," *Canadian Geographer* 55 (2011): 397-406.
  7. William G. Dean, "Forward," in *Historical Atlas of Canada, Volume 1: From the Beginning to 1800*, ed. Cole Harris (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1988), i.
  8. Jean-Pierre Wallot, "Forward," in Cole Harris ed., *Historical Atlas of Canada, Volume 1: From the Beginning to 1800* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1988), ii
  9. Consider the *Atlas of Alberta* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1969). Unlike Manitoba and Saskatchewan, Alberta has not produced an updated provincial atlas.
  10. A retrospective account provides an instructive account of large data sets and cartographic design, see Rosemary E. Ommer and Clifford H. Wood, "Data, Concept and the Translation to Graphics," *Cartographica* 22 (1985): 44-62.
  11. This portrayal was done before the release of census data, and it would be a valid exercise to re-map the divided city with 1921 census data.
  12. The configuration of Canada in 1891 does check metropolitan biases by indicating Inuit land use areas, and ceded and unceded Indian lands, see volume 3, plate 1.
  13. D.W. Meinig, review of *Historical Atlas of Canada*, vol. 3, *Addressing the Twentieth Century*, in the *Canadian Historical Review* 73 (1992): 399.
  14. For an outstanding piece of scholarship, informed by the needs of the Specific Claims process, see Stewart Raby, "Indian Land Surrenders in Southern Saskatchewan," *Canadian Geographer* 17 (1973): 30-52.



## Two Cheers for Historical Geography after Postmodernism: An Ironic Assessment

**Phillip Gordon Mackintosh**

*Department Geography and Tourism Studies  
Brock University*

*One of the great [liberal] heroes was the English novelist and essayist, E.M. Forster, who wrote a book called, Two Cheers for Democracy. He couldn't summon a third.<sup>1</sup>*

One hundred and fifty years into the project of Canada, historical geography matters. Having been weaned on postmodernist theory and methods as an English major in the late 1980s and early 1990s, I find this surprising, because the "history matters" proposition threatened to fracture at the height of the postmodern revolution. There were good reasons for postmodern skepticism, the principal being a growing disavowal of historiographical 'objectivity,' authorial 'neutrality,' and especially historical 'fact' – historical truth – in the wake of the deconstruction of the foundations of Western philosophy and epistemology. Without objective truths or facts, why would anyone write history at all?