

# WHY HALIFAX WAS FOUNDED<sup>1</sup>

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IT is a recognized fact that many of the underlying motives in colonial history are too little regarded. Our version of eighteenth century American history, in particular, teems with citations of established fact, the multitude of which tends to obscure the determining factors of the great conflict which was its chief feature. Records of battles, of military campaigns and frontier skirmishes, have occupied far too great a share of our attention; and those important matters of policy, in the realm of ideas rather than of events, have been comparatively ignored. The ultimate explanation of a great deal of our history lies in the deliberations of the cabinet councils of Europe; and it is in their decisions alone that we can sound the depths of the struggle for world commerce and dominion. Pitt and Choiseul shaped the policies of which Wolfe and Montcalm were but the instruments.

The treatment to which Nova Scotian history has been hitherto subjected offers striking examples of the habit of considering only men and things upon the spot. In what manner the destiny of this province was affected by imperial ideas or by an international situation is one of those things which historians can easily pass by, but which, nevertheless, are vitally significant. The Acadians have, up to 1755, practically monopolized the pages of every Nova Scotian history that has been written. But they were established upon Nova Scotian soil, spread themselves over a considerable part of the province, and were annexed to the British Crown, almost unknown to British statesmen. The chief explanation is that Imperial policy throughout the early eighteenth century was an outspokenly commercial one. Even after Utrecht no British Government was prepared to expend large sums of money in bringing law and order to a province and a people which could promise so little of profit or compensation. Nova Scotia was valued only for the fisheries on its coastline. And the negotiators of Utrecht, while they could see little utility in drawing interior limits to the province, carefully marked out limits to the coastal waters within which the French were prohibited to fish.

It may be objected, and with some justice, that in the early eighteenth century, Imperial policy, such as it was, was largely left

1. This plan has been discovered in the library of the House of Lords at Westminster. To the knowledge of the writer there is no copy in the Public Record Office or in any other collection of manuscripts in the United Kingdom. A possible exception may be the Bedford Manuscripts at Woburn Abbey which, however, are not open for public investigation.

unexecuted; and that whatever ideas British statesmen held upon the government, exploitation and expansion of the American empire were but ideas and were seldom translated into practice. Certainly Walpole's easy and tolerant administration left the colonies to develop and defend themselves much by their own resources. Interference from Whitehall was confined practically to constitutional problems. In but one instance, that of Georgia, was a course of territorial expansion commenced; and there, for many years, the design was permitted to languish and almost die out. The day in which the fate of the continent was to be decided had not yet dawned. Inertia is reflected in the neglect of Nova Scotia during the period. The country was left to the Acadians and to the New England fishermen. Twice, in 1719 and in 1730, Governor Phillips had been obliged to visit his province for the prime purpose of making it a reserve of timberland for the Royal Navy, but the manner in which his efforts were unsupported and unseconded by the apathetic British Government condemned the country to remain almost wilderness. It was not until the administration could be persuaded to adopt a course of conscious imperialism that Nova Scotia was to be settled by British subjects and to become firmly knit in the fabric of the Empire.

It was the War of the Austrian Succession that demonstrated the value of the province in the British imperial system. With the empire slowly expanding as a result of the individual efforts of British subjects, peacetime could not illustrate its enormous strategic importance. It remained for the French, by their tenacious attempts to regain its mastery, to exhibit to the unwilling administration the rôle which the narrow peninsula might play in the struggle for the continent, which, even in 1744, appeared imminent to a great many. As soon as news of war was received, the Louisbourg command destroyed Canso. Later in 1744, a more formidable but ill-concerted attempt was made upon Annapolis. In 1745, Marin threw the forces of Quebec into the struggle which was gradually attaining a wider scale; but these, happily for Annapolis, were diverted from the intended sector of operations by the appearance of the New Englanders before Louisburg. The great attempt was made in 1746 by both the home and colonial authorities. D'Anville's battered fleet in September made its melancholy way into Chebucto Harbour; and de Ramesay hovered about the Acadian countryside with a large detachment from Quebec. We are not concerned here with the fate of the combined expeditions. Here serves only as an earnest of the fixed determination of the French to reduce Nova Scotia. But even after this disastrous failure that

determination did not flag. In 1747 the last French attempt was baffled by the victory of Lord Anson off Cape Finisterre. La Jonquière, with five vessels of the line, had been detailed for an attack on Annapolis.

The French ambition, indicated by their many attempts to reduce the province, had the inevitable effect of turning the attention of British officialdom to the long neglected Acadian region. In the early stages of the war the seizure of Cape Breton had been hailed as so great an event that no Government would have dared to restore it. "It might have been safer for the Ministry to cede the Isle of Wight to France than to yield up that of Cape Breton."<sup>1</sup> Pepperrell and his jubilant New Englanders inundated Whitehall with suggestions for the erection of a new province and the encouragement of the fishing population of Massachusetts to emigrate thither. Supporters of the Government, too, boomed the conquest as a means of justifying the conduct of the war. Newcastle and his colleagues, though not viewing a North American campaign with enthusiasm, deemed it necessary to follow up the initial success. A plan was drawn up for a 1746 campaign by which regular troops and New England levies should attack Quebec from Louisburg, and forces from the middle and southern colonies should march overland against Montreal. The Louisburg success had at last, it seemed, impelled the British Government to adopt the policy of expelling the French from North America.

The Ministry's intentions were evidently sincere. The spring of 1746 was occupied by feverish preparations in New England; and a fleet and army were assembled at Portsmouth under Admiral Lestock and General St. Clair. But contrary winds were so prevalent that, when the expedition was at last enabled to sail, the season for North American operations was too far advanced. And the Government, apparently pleased with an excellent excuse for cancellation of the programme, despatched the troops upon an incursion into Brittany. What had promised, therefore, to become a vigorous assertion of British strength in North America frittered away. A few defensive precautions were taken, but there was little desire for extensive operations in so far removed a field. The New England effort to drive the common enemy from the continent remained unsupported.

In Whitehall the failure was viewed with nonchalance, and the importance of the Cape Breton conquest sank accordingly in the public mind. By the end of 1746 the Government was prepared, with appropriate compensation, to restore it to France. At one

1. *National Prejudice Opposed to the National Interest*. London, 1747.

stage it was mooted that Spain should be detached from the French alliance by the restoration of Gibraltar in return for a Spanish guarantee that Louisburg should remain in British hands; but this suggestion for peace without restitution made little impression upon Newcastle, though many were in favour of Cape Breton as against Gibraltar. After the continued defeats of the Allied armies in the Low Countries, there was no alternative to surrender when Aix-la-Chappelle preliminary was signed. During the conversations the British plenipotentiaries placed an exaggerated value on the island in order to secure as much as possible in return, but the French were satisfied. Their emissaries had been instructed to conclude no peace without restitution of the island which guarded the entrance to the St. Lawrence; and they demanded and received two hostages as a surety for its safe return.

But the essential point with which we are here concerned is that, as Cape Breton waned in popular estimation, so the importance of Nova Scotia increased in proportion. As it became more and more evident that the restoration of the French island was inevitable, the peninsula appeared as the field in which British efforts must be concentrated. Powerful commercial interests kept the North American situation under the eyes of the Government despite the ministerial tendency to ignore developments outside the more glamorous European setting; and the publicity bestowed upon the province by the war, especially after the expedition of d'Anville, had done much to impress upon a hitherto unappreciative public the value of its natural resources, particularly of the fishery. At the close of 1747 a writer in the *Westminster Journal* voiced the current opinion of the value of Nova Scotia as "worth more than Cape Breton and Newfoundland together", or even as "equal to Canada and Cape Breton together."<sup>1</sup>

The long period of neglect, indeed, had at last been ended. North American trade had during the eighteenth century slowly risen to be of the first magnitude in the Imperial mercantile system, and both Britain and France were prepared to expend their manpower and capital in a struggle for supremacy. The Acadian sector, which commanded the approach to the continent and was the chief meeting-place of the two nations, was to be the scene of the first hostility in the clash of empires. The French had been the earlier to realize the strategic advantage that control of the peninsula would entail, as the expedition of d'Anville well bore witness. And to Newcastle the spectacle of a great French fleet at anchor in an Acadian harbour, prepared to bombard Boston

1. Reprint in *Gentleman's Magazine*, January, 1748.

and to destroy the trade of the northern colonies, proved a warning to take precautionary measures. The sailing of the French expedition had aroused fears of serious damage to British interests in the New World; and, immediately following intelligence of its departure, St. Clair had been ordered to Nova Scotia to place the forts in a state of defence and to keep the Acadians under control, commands which were withdrawn when it was understood that no port in the region could receive the troops for the winter. The administration was certainly at this time willing to place Nova Scotia upon a permanent defensive establishment. As early as the opening of 1747, Newcastle had been persuaded that a military and naval base at Chebucto was essential for securing the province from its aggressive neighbours to the north and east.

Although the war ended before the vague plans which were in circulation could be developed, the war-time designs did not pass out of current speculation. Newcastle, it is certain, kept Nova Scotia constantly in mind during the Aix-la-Chappelle negotiations, and extracted from the French a guarantee of its integrity. For the treaty did not settle the great questions which were at issue between the two nations; nor did it remove, especially in the colonies, the attitude of mutual fear and suspicion which was about to bring them into another and greater war. The Nova Scotian project supplied to the world additional testimony that the treaty of Aix-la-Chappelle had closed but another phase of the struggle for world dominion. Newcastle, as Secretary of State for the Southern Department, was in the beginning its chief sponsor, but a re-shuffle of ministerial posts placed the business in the hands of the Duke of Bedford. Bedford, however, was not the prime mover, for the new President of the Board of Trade, Lord Halifax, became the directing force in its planning and execution. A statesman of mediocre talent, but keenly interested in the welfare of the colonies, Halifax had risen to high position in the train of his patron, the Duke of Newcastle, the manipulator of the Whig system. From what information is available, Halifax had in his earlier life taken little interest in the province, though his father, a leading statesman of Queen Anne's reign, had been the author of a scheme to seize it from the French and establish within it a colony of Scotsmen.<sup>1</sup>

The lengthy document containing the project for the settlement of Nova Scotia, which was placed in the hands of the Duke of Bedford in March of 1749, was not the work of Halifax alone. The basic ideas of the plan had been suggested by several others

1. Vide Egerton MSS. No. 929.

who, in varying degrees, had been in contact with the Nova Scotian situation, notably Shirley, Governor of Massachusetts, Admiral Warren, Commodore Knowles, Bollan, the Agent-General for Massachusetts, and Clarke, the Lieutenant-Governor of New York. From the fall of Louisburg until the execution of the project all of these submitted advisory memorials to the administration. There were also others of lesser rank, chiefly of military and naval circles, from whom Newcastle had drawn inspiration when he had passed the duty along to Halifax. Chief among these were Otis Little, who had written a treatise upon the subject, William Vaughan, a prominent New Englander, and Captain John Rouse, commander of a sloop of war which had taken a prominent part in the fighting in the Acadian region. Among all these, it may be held that the New England inspiration was most persistent and most strong. The survey which Captain Charles Morris conducted at the orders of Shirley about Chignecto Bay late in 1748 illustrates the close connection between the ideas of the home and colonial authorities. Lands were laid out for fourteen hundred New England families which, it was hoped, would flock to Nova Scotia following the declaration of imperial policy. If credit is to be assigned, we must not forget the staunch figure of Mascarene at Annapolis, whose correspondence with Shirley in these years contains much material suggestive of what was to follow.

Of the national advantages which would result from the project, it was the redressing of the New England grievance which Halifax considered to be of the first importance. The anger and spleen of the northern colonists following the restitution of their conquest had been so intense that the Home Government felt it unwise to ignore it. New Englanders had removed the menace to their safety and the British Government had restored it; and that Government owed New England a line of defences which could preserve it from the French. The old idea of Nova Scotia as a barrier to all the other colonies was now revived and noised abroad. Its geographical position, in the belief of strategists, warranted a large expenditure of military and naval strength.

Population, as well as fortification, in the belief of Halifax, was essential to security. In his reasoning the Acadians were of the utmost danger. During the long years of English neglect, they, in the current exaggerated views of Acadian increase, had grown in numbers from 2,500 to 20,000. Within another thirty-five years they would increase at the same rate to 160,000, a people with whom the English would be unable to cope. Therefore, before it should be too late, English settlers should be mingled with them so that they should be bound fast to English rule.

For as it is indisputably clear from the facts I have already stated, that if we do not speedily secure this colony, a few years will put it out of the power of government to do it, and, of course, it must become a powerful French settlement without the assistance, without the expense, and without the trouble of France. The precarious footing upon which His Majesty's possessions in North America will stand is plain to every common understanding which will be at the pains of considering what the united force of Canada, Nova Scotia and Cape Breton is like to be.

The second national advantage which Halifax prophesied was, of course, increased trade. As England was more and more becoming a manufacturing nation rather than a producer of primary commodities, the old belief that northern colonies were hindrances rather than benefits was disappearing. New England was consuming an increasing quantity of British goods; and Nova Scotia would appear at its side as a new market. The time-worn expectation of a steady supply of masts for the Royal Navy again appeared in the calculations of Halifax; and the fur-trade, then held by the French, would become English. Of equal, or perhaps of greater, importance was the hope of curtailing French encroachments upon the fishery and the subsequent weakening of the sea-power to which France had given much attention in recent years.

The profits made by this unjustifiable encroachment is allowed on all hands to have been very considerable, and it must necessarily have been as advantageous to the naval power of France to be in possession of this great nursery of seamen as it has been disadvantageous to the naval power of Great Britain to be deprived of it.

For the settlement of a colony designed for a semi-military purpose, Halifax chose disbanded soldiers and seamen who were to be rewarded for their services in the late struggle by grants of land upon easy terms, "men of tried courage and loyalty, inured to hardships, accustomed to enterprises of difficulty and danger, familiarized to subordination and willing to obey orders." To these, Admiral Vernon in the House of Commons had been urging relief, and they now appeared as excellent human material for the founding of a new colony. The seamen, reasoned the proposer, would take quickly to the fishery; and the soldiers, experienced with forts and entrenchments, could be as profitably employed. The number of persons who should be first sent from England should be three thousand, which, while not taxing too greatly the resources of the nation, would be a firm foundation on which to build up the colony. They should be disposed of as follows:—

At Chebucto.....	1,200
La Have.....	300
Whitehead <sup>1</sup> .....	500
Bay Verte.....	500
Minas.....	500
	<hr/>
In all.....	3,000

This was the bare framework of the plan of the new champion of Nova Scotia who now entered upon the organization of the expedition with great enthusiasm. Most of the details are well known. The new town at Chebucto was to be the capital of the province, but a fortress of almost equal strength was to be erected at Chignecto to defend the isthmus which so completely dominated the country. And at Minas and Pisiqid, in the heart of the Acadian country, there were to be built smaller forts from which the susceptible inhabitants were to be guarded against the damaging effects of French propaganda. Two regiments were to be assigned for service in the province; and, in lieu of warships, it was decided to employ smaller vessels which could not be rendered ineffective by the numerous rocks and shoals of the coastline.

Before concluding the resumé of the plan of Lord Halifax, we must briefly note the effect it produced upon the destinies of the Acadians. The earlier designs of Shirley and Knowles to introduce violent measures of repression had been abandoned, following the instructions of Newcastle in October of 1747; and some pronouncement of policy was necessary to define the Acadian status in the new colony. Halifax surveyed the many testimonies with which he had been supplied and came to the conclusion that

As they are all Roman Catholics and heartily devoted to the French interest; if they are not to be absolutely regarded as utter enemies to His Majesty's Government, they cannot be accounted less than unprofitable inhabitants for their conditional oath will not entitle them to the confidence and privileges of English subjects.

But the proposer and his advisers were prepared to continue the struggle to reduce the Acadians to British rule by peaceful methods. The plan stipulated that the Governor should promise freedom of property and religion in return for an unconditional acceptance of the Oath of Allegiance. But there can be detected throughout the document the idea of gradually superimposing the Protestant religion and British culture, language and customs upon the Acadian communities. This was probably the ideal by which Cornwallis and Hopson were later inspired. Halifax

1. A harbour south-west of Canso.



proposed that one thousand of the new colonists should be settled among the French at Minas and Annapolis, that the Acadian country should be partitioned in townships in such a manner as to prevent segregation of the races, that intermarriage should be promoted among French, English and Indians. French refugee clergymen were to be sent from England to convert the Acadians and to educate their children, the episcopal jurisdiction of Quebec was to be denied, and rewards of land-grants were to be made to those of the Acadians who should agree to conversion. From these sweeping proposals of the new President of the Board of Trade it can readily be recognized that as soon as Cornwallis set foot on the beach at Chebucto the free and primitive Acadie, with all its archaic simplicity, was doomed to extinction.

There remains but the duty of estimating the importance of this plan which Halifax so painstakingly prepared. It represents the first conscious and wholehearted effort which British statesmen had yet made to take possession of a large tract of territory to which their sovereign had an excellent legal right, and to secure thereby the North American empire from French encroachments. The threat to French security had a tremendous influence on the international situation. Louisburg could no longer dominate the approach to the continent; the vital Quebec-Cape Breton communication was endangered; the plans of La Gallissonnière, the ambitious French governor, were baulked. The move was a necessary preliminary to the reduction of the continent. The rôle which Halifax later played as a base from which French fleets could be intercepted and at which British armaments could be prepared should be abundant evidence for the acceptance of this statement. Nova Scotia enjoys the unique position of having been the only North American colony planted with a deliberately imperial purpose.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE.

The material for this article has been taken from several manuscript sources in London. Papers which have not previously been examined in connection with this subject may be briefly enumerated as follows:—(1) The extensive Newcastle collection in the Additional Manuscripts of the British Museum. Warren's suggestions are found in the Egerton MSS. (2) Papers presented to the House of Lords in 1752, containing the plan of Lord Halifax and other papers not in the Public Record Office. (3) Papers in the Public Record Office, notably Series C.O. 5, nos. 13 (which contains Bolland's suggestions), 44 and 45. State Papers Domestic Series 42, no. 98, contain the correspondence of Newcastle and St. Clair.