

# *Golden Age or Bronze Moment? Wealth and Poverty in Nova Scotia: the 1850s and 1860s*

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"Reality is inevitably more complex, less glamorous and more interesting than myth"

## I

An enduring myth about nineteenth-century Nova Scotia is that it enjoyed a golden age.<sup>1</sup> A history of the concept deserves to be written, for it has had an important formative role in moulding Nova Scotians' views about their past.<sup>2</sup> The clearest statement about Nova Scotia's economic golden age was made in a 1967 address by a young historian. "The fifteen years preceding Confederation," he believed, "had been a veritable golden age for the economy of Nova Scotia."<sup>3</sup> Others spoke only of a golden age of sail, but were precise in identifying 1846 as the year the age was inaugurated.<sup>4</sup> Proponents of this view often use the familiar image of the Nova Scotian-built ship "whitening every sea with . . . rich freight."<sup>5</sup> Other commentators are sure that the idea of a golden age in general has historical value.<sup>6</sup> The myth sees the golden age brought to rather an abrupt end, not by anything "poor old Nova Scotia," to use Joseph Howe's phrase, either did herself or omitted doing,<sup>7</sup> but principally through the actions of others. In particular this was the responsibility of the United States Congress which in 1866 abrogated the Reciprocity Treaty. This damage was compounded in 1867 by Nova Scotia's almost forced entry into a common economic market and political federation with other British North American colonies. This double blow, it was believed, brought the prosperous era to its close. Such a sense of prolonged prosperity has never again returned to Nova Scotians, and now seems a remote possibility in the future.

This essay examines the economic basis for Nova Scotia's nineteenth century golden age. Was it in fact a golden age or merely what might be called a bronze moment in a recurring economic pattern?

## II

The first thing to be noted is that the golden age escaped the observation of Nova Scotians, who were supposed to have lived through it. Contemporary newspapers in Nova Scotia, at least to the end of the 1870s, made no reference to a golden age, material, moral or intellectual. By contrast, they contained the usual range of worried commentary about the shifting state of the provincial economy. The focus was usually regional, and memories were short and particular. They employed the phrase 'hard times' to describe depression, which the province underwent between 1842 and the end of 1852. When the economy was experiencing periods of economic recession, as it did in 1856-57, 1860-61 and from late 1864 to 1869, these were termed 'dull times.' There were, of course, some references to prosperous years in the 1850s and 1860s, but only rarely were terms of prosperity applied to the entire province, and then more out of ignorance of what was occurring beyond the editor's horizon. For instance, the *Acadian Recorder* noted in its 1853 end-of-year survey that "the country has during this year been, upon the whole, flourishing . . . the country is steadily and somewhat gently prospering."<sup>8</sup> A year later the *Yarmouth Herald* believed that the province had "participated in the universal prosperity" of the previous two years,<sup>9</sup> ignorant of the fact that throughout 1853 and well into 1854 the *Cape Breton News* had regularly commented on the "languishing state" of Cape Breton County.<sup>10</sup> Halifax's *Morning Chronicle* also believed that the year 1854 had been "one of the most prosperous"<sup>11</sup> ever experienced in Nova Scotia's entire history, though it also admitted that there had been only an average catch in the fisheries, while shipbuilding and hence the lumber industry were depressed. A decade later in January 1865 at the end of a three-year boom, Postmaster General Woodgate, when comparing post office statistics for 1862-64 with those of a decade earlier, boasted to Charles Tupper that they displayed "convincing evidence of the progressive prosperity of the province."<sup>12</sup> Most references elsewhere in newspapers wisely confined their observations to their own localities. Thus the *Liverpool Transcript* spoke in February 1854 of the "present prosperous state of Queen's County,"<sup>13</sup> while Pictou's *Eastern Chronicle* in July 1855 believed that the "business prospects of the neighbourhood" were unprecedentedly promising, though it was worried about the scarcity of money and credit. "Our young men have ceased going to the United States," it added as clinching evidence of a new attitude among Nova Scotians "and at the same time, and in consequence, our young women also."<sup>14</sup>

If contemporaries thus believed that for most regions in Nova Scotia—Cape Breton being the exception—the year 1854 had been an excellent one, it was not followed by a second. Indeed not until the thirty-six months between late-1861 and the autumn of 1864 would such public talk of widespread prosperity again be found in the press of Nova Scotia. This time the boom arose with the heightened demand occasioned by the civil war between the American states, just as earlier the mini-boom of 1854 had been



occasioned by the worldwide shortages created by the Crimean War. Now in the early 1860s the very length of the Civil War, the bitterness with which it was engaged, the enormous growth of United States and Confederate public spending, the loss of skilled workers to the armies and their very heavy casualties, as well as the generally heightened demand opened real and tangible opportunities for the Maritime colonies, which free trade in domestic goods under the Reciprocity Treaty merely amplified.

By the end of 1864 there thus seemed solid grounds for self-congratulation in Nova Scotia. This time the evidence was widespread. In Cornwallis Township, which the *Yarmouth Tribune* called the "garden of the Province,"<sup>15</sup> on every hand could be seen "tokens of prosperity, improvement and progress." Windsor was reported to be both prosperous and busy, with new wealth, not from the old gypsum trade which had been crippled by the civil war, but from shipping and shipbuilding.<sup>16</sup> The *Yarmouth Herald* described Digby as now a "beautiful and well-planned town,"<sup>17</sup> where shipbuilding was important along with the fisheries, while a newly established boot and shoe factory completed 100 pairs weekly. Bridgewater, with its "immense piles of cordwood, bark and shingles piled where the sidewalks should have been,"<sup>18</sup> boasted in the fall of 1864 a new water-powered foundry, which manufactured shipwork, millwork, stoves, tools and agricultural implements. Weymouth had in the previous five years made "visible and rapid progress"<sup>19</sup> with its sawmills and carriage factory. Canning, a "flourishing village" where everything indicated "vitality and progress" was painted by the editor of the *Yarmouth Tribune* in grand colours: "No place that we have seen in Nova Scotia, not even our own Yarmouth," he wrote, "has made more rapid and substantial progress during the last seven years."<sup>20</sup> There were twenty-two stores in its principal street and eight more under construction. It exemplified the editor's idea of a "live town" with its shipbuilding vigorously pursued, its five chapels, masonic lodge and temperance hall. Tragically, less than two years after these words were penned, the village burned to the ground. Some fifty-three buildings were destroyed with an estimated loss of \$100,000, of which only one-fifth carried insurance. As the *Liverpool Transcript* reported in 1866 "not a house or store was left on the banks of the Habitant River for nearly half a mile."<sup>21</sup> The "whole western section of Nova Scotia exhibits the evidence of steady and uninterrupted prosperity,"<sup>22</sup> the *Yarmouth Tribune* concluded in September 1864. Even sleepy Shelburne had come alive! By the end of 1864—clearly the *annus mirabilis* in nineteenth-century Nova Scotia's economic history—the village exhibited a remarkable "change for the better."<sup>23</sup> New buildings were going up and new stores being opened. Carts laden with timber crowded the roads leading into town. Some thirty ships on the stocks were in various stages of construction. Across the province, in the course of a generation the village of Berwick had been transformed from scattered rude farmhouses standing among stump-ridden fields, to become "one of the most delightful and flourishing villages in the province. Beautiful cottages surrounded with ornamental trees and flower gardens, retail stores, mechanics shops, a post office, a commodious Temperance Hall and

two stylish places of worship."<sup>24</sup> In the mid-1860s similar accounts appeared in the *Eastern Chronicle* on Amherst, Antigonish, Pugwash, River John and Wallace, all testifying to the material progress of many parts of Nova Scotia before 1865.

What of Halifax, the densely populated commercial centre and political heart of the province? Susan Bugey has described the commercial revival of the town's core as being stimulated in part by three serious fires between 1857 and 1861.<sup>25</sup> In October 1865, the *Halifax Citizen* believed the moment was ripe to use the example of Halifax to defend the entire province against those who then sneered at Nova Scotia "as being a poor and unprogressive country."<sup>26</sup> Such critics, the newspaper complained, had wholly failed to take into account the abundant "evidence of rapidly increasing wealth . . . the magnificent buildings, the noise and bustle of its principal business streets . . . Where ten years ago, fields of cow pastures were found, there are today elegant mansions and neat cottages . . . Everywhere in and around the city, in its external appearance, are the evidences of increasing population and rapidly increasing wealth."<sup>27</sup> Conspicuous consumption also took other forms:

On the shelves of a Granville dry goods store today will be found a class of goods that no merchant would dream of importing a few years ago. Yet these rich and costly fabrics find ready purchasers with a yearly increasing demand . . . People do not buy costly carpets or attractive pictures or elegant pianofortes without being able to pay for them; and the demand for musical instruments particularly for the pianofortes of the best description is such as must surprise those who are not aware of the facts . . . The increase of wealth . . . is found throughout the province in every county, in every town and village. Men are doing business, living in a better style, and indulging in more expensive luxuries than they were in a position to do a few years ago.

Was this then the clinching evidence for the golden age in Nova Scotia: pianofortes in the homes of wealthy Haligonians? Is this the scale upon which the economy of Nova Scotia in the 1850s and 1860s is to be weighed: a mere four years of general widespread prosperity in 1854 and in 1862 through 1864 in the thirty years between 1841 and 1871? If these are sufficient grounds to erect a myth, should historians continue to lend it support, and thereby make the personal stories of a select few wealthy households the history of an entire people? I think not!

If you read the same newspapers for all the years I have so far omitted, there was an altogether different account given for the 1850s and 1860s by Nova Scotians. For a decade before mid-1853 there were no references anywhere among contemporaries about prosperity and progress. The same applies generally to the period from late 1855 through to late 1861, and from early 1865 up to at least mid-1869. In 1852, for instance, the *Nova Scotian* found the province generally "a new and comparatively poor country,"<sup>28</sup>

where a good harvest and a productive fishery in a single season could transform the people in an almost magical way from abject poverty to abundant wealth. In 1860 the *Acadian Recorder*, in a moment of reflection, described 1851 as an important turning point:

The year 1851 was just about the worst period of a term of several years of the greatest commercial depression that Nova Scotians had ever experienced. Trade was dull, agricultural pursuits were almost at a standstill. Our mines were locked up . . . Manufactures, in the ordinary sense, scarcely existed. People were dispirited, and a tide of emigration had been for years pouring out of the country, whilst little or none was coming into it. That year seemed to be about the turning point in our future.<sup>29</sup>

The *Halifax Colonist* in its end of year evaluation felt that there were no obvious grounds for Nova Scotians to take pride in the accomplishments of 1852, when "depopulation and ruin are staring us in the face . . . Nova Scotia is declining in wealth and population, and her importance is confined to being a temporary stopping place for the Cunard steamers, and the consumption . . . of the cheap and trashy manufactures of the United States."<sup>30</sup> Even the short boom of 1854 created by 1855 considerable alarm as wage increases, which were characteristic of this period, seemed to be outstripped by even more rapidly rising prices for all sorts of commodities and services. Monetary pressures visible in 1855 became severe in 1856, when the Crimean War unexpectedly ended. Then the *Liverpool Transcript* wrote of "our comparatively abandoned wharves, our unthronged streets, of our exiled population, or our uneasy dispirited mechanics, of almost everybody in debt, debt!"<sup>31</sup> There was a widespread, and now well documented financial panic in 1857, which had a powerful impact on the Atlantic economy, and resonated very strongly in Nova Scotia.<sup>32</sup> The *Halifax Sun* wrote as if the province was on the edge of an abyss.<sup>33</sup> The *Yarmouth Herald* believed that the province's economy was sound, but that the banks had "got up a panic among themselves"<sup>34</sup> and so triggered a devastating credit squeeze. The *Acadian Recorder* believed that the commercial disaster was the most extensive ever to be experienced simultaneously by Europe and the Americas.<sup>35</sup>

The mixed success of the Nova Scotian economy continued to be discussed in the newspapers. If 1858 proved to have been a year of recovery for the farmer, it had been a disastrous repetition of 1857 for fishermen. Halifax's *Evening Examiner* believed that merchants would in 1859 soon again be "upon their legs."<sup>36</sup> The recovery proved short-lived and 1860 was a year of disappointing recession, which deepened in 1861 into commercial depression, as the *Acadian Recorder* noted: "It is doubtful if ever within the memory of any living person there was a season of such great commercial depression in this Province, and especially in Halifax, as at the present time. Every person, rich and poor, has seen, known and felt something of the trouble consequent upon the present 'tightness' in the money market."<sup>37</sup> Fear of war

between the States had made everyone in the Atlantic world extremely worried, although the newspaper blamed the failure that year of the fish market in the United States upon the repeated successes of American fishermen in Nova Scotia's coastal waters.<sup>38</sup>

After the boom of 1862-64, tight money reappeared in the autumn of 1864, begun by a financial crisis in Britain, where depression lasted until 1869. In the USA, where by 1865 wholesale and retail prices had reached points 107% and 80% respectively above their 1860 levels, a long price decline began, bringing down wages in their train.<sup>39</sup> The years 1867-68 were depressed in the USA with uncertainty helping to create a disturbed money market. Replacing the very optimistic accounts in 1864, already noted above, the press of Nova Scotia reported the changing economic prospects with a litany of complaints. This was especially evident by 1866-1867. The *Eastern Chronicle* was ready to link the change in the economic climate to the new Confederation of British North American provinces. In an important editorial, entitled 'The Results of Confederation' it found: "Business of all kinds is in a more depressed state than it has been for years, that money is unusually scarce, and that in many parts of the province—especially among fishermen the most poignant distress prevails. Add to this fact that every day the youth are leaving the province for the United States."<sup>40</sup> This tone is remarkably similar to newspaper comment found frequently in the 1840s and early 1850s, and for most years between 1856 and 1861 inclusive. It was no longer enough that the forests had fallen to the woodman's axe, that bridle paths through the forest had given way to well made roads, while the "lumbering stage coach and old fashioned mail carriers are giving way to the puffing locomotive and luxurious cars whistling along over the iron railway."<sup>41</sup> The fact was that despite all Nova Scotia's supposed natural advantages, with its enterprising, thrifty inhabitants, the *Eastern Chronicle* still believed in 1869 that:

There is no single state in the American Union which has not far outstripped Nova Scotia in material progress, increase of wealth and population and all that contributes to national greatness. This is a fact of which every Nova Scotian must be cognizant, and it is high time we took steps to ascertain the cause and to answer the question: would our progress have been as slow if Nova Scotia had for the last fifty years been a State in the American Union?<sup>42</sup>

As the editor assumed his readers largely agreed with him, he did not bother to answer his own question.

So much for contemporary observation and a representative taste of the rhetoric! It is clear that there were few reasons, if the newspapers are a fair guide, for contemporaries to have described the 1850s and the 1860s as a golden age. The era had begun with what had appeared as permanently blasted economic hopes, giving rise to profound feelings accompanied by feelings of isolation and economic helplessness.<sup>43</sup> It now ended with an apparent widespread sense of the province's relative weakness and poverty,

when measured alongside any one of the states in the American union, where so many tens of thousands of native Nova Scotians were already living, or to which they were intent upon moving. To what extent does the objective evidence, to which we shall now turn, confirm this contemporary view?

### III

What really was the relative state of the provincial economy in the 1850s and 1860s? It must be remembered that Nova Scotia was influenced by the same business cycles which affected the national economies of all states forming part of the Atlantic economy. This was not new in 1850. It had been the case from the very founding of Halifax, with its emergence as a small entrepôt during the Seven Years' War (1756-63).<sup>44</sup> When the economy passed from its early restricted and primitive condition to become engulfed in the wars against revolutionary and Napoleonic France, it became even more closely integrated into this large, international economic world, with its successions of booms, recessions and depressions. This too characterized its economic history in the years of comparative peace from 1815 onwards.

Now, when measuring growth over long intervals, economic historians usually "choose periods which begin and end when the economy is in roughly comparable state, normally when it is working at full stretch in a boom and almost all resources of the nation are fully employed."<sup>45</sup> If we were strictly to follow this approach, the years of comparison should perhaps be 1812-15 with 1862-64. To contrast, for instance, the 1840s, during a period of profound depression, with the 1850s and 1860s, when an obvious recovery had occurred, would be to present a distorted and exaggerated picture of economic advance. Yet to compare, say 1850-52 with 1870-72, would be to analyse the economy in not dissimilar stages, though neither was in a boom phase. Both 1851 and 1871 were years when census returns were completed in Nova Scotia, and an unusual amount of data was generated. Levels of accumulated wealth by 1850-52, after a decade of depression must necessarily have been lower than in 1870-72 when, though the economy was just recovering from a sharp recession between 1865 and 1869, a number of excellent years had been experienced, the accumulated capital from which clearly had not then already been dispersed.

Estimates about relative prosperity at different times in the past can be made by an analysis of wealth distribution. One method involves the study of inventories of assets and lists of debts, found in the probate records of the recently deceased.<sup>46</sup> For Nova Scotia, two samples have been drawn from all probated wealth holders who died either in 1850-52 or in 1871.<sup>47</sup> Evidence gathered was arranged by first collecting details on assets in real estate, personal possessions, financial securities, cash and producers' goods. Debts incurred before death were then subtracted from the gross value of the accumulated total assets in order to establish the net worth of all decedent wealth holders. The details for 1850-52 are found in Table 1. The province was divided into four principal economic regions, one of which was Halifax



TABLE 1

*Mean Probated & Inventoried Wealth, Nova Scotia 1850-52*

Region	Elite	Farmers	Others	Not Given	Mean
Halifax	\$10,764	\$ 932	\$2,551	\$1,158	\$4,514
Fundy	6,651	1,893	830	2,739	2,689
Western	4,538	1,351	1,627	1,137	1,805
Eastern	8,240	1,335	244	419	1,895
All	7,447	1,521	1,485	1,672	2,513

County, owing to the great average wealth of the city of Halifax itself. The Fundy region included all counties from Annapolis to Cumberland, with ports on the Bay of Fundy. The Western region included all counties from Digby to Lunenburg. The Eastern region included all of Cape Breton as well as the counties of Pictou, Antigonish and Guysborough. As Table 1 makes plain, mean wealth in 1850-52 amounted to \$2,513, led by Halifax County with \$4,514, followed by Fundy region at \$2,689. The other two regions each had mean wealth significantly below the provincial average.

Wealth holders were then divided by occupational class. The elite group consisted of merchants, gentlemen, bankers, master mariners, shipbuilders and ship owners. By far the largest class were the agriculturalists, as the nineteenth-century commentators referred to them, and included those identified as yeomen or as farmers. The third group were the craftsmen and traders, but also included the few fishermen and common labourers whose estates were probated and whose assets were inventoried. The fourth group, which included those not assigned an occupation, was principally composed of women, mainly widowed. Evidence from Table 1 shows that the wealth of the elite was almost five times larger than that for agriculturalists and craftsmen-tradesmen, while the wealth of the Halifax County elite exceeded all other regional elites in the rest of the province. By contrast the wealthiest farmers, those in the Fundy economic region, were far better off than the farmers of Halifax County, who were the poorest on average. Yet only the farmers of the Fundy region held wealth above the provincial mean for all farmers.

Before we compare these data for 1850-52 with those for 1871 something must be said about commodity prices. To make the data comparable, wealth information for 1871 has had to be corrected by the rate of inflation since 1850-52. Evidence for price changes, both wholesale and retail, for the 1850s and 1860s, is considerable.<sup>48</sup> Wholesale prices were found principally in Halifax newspapers, and an index of some 76 comparable commodities was composed. Retail prices, found in a wide variety of business ledgers in many archives, but principally in the Public Archives of Nova Scotia,<sup>49</sup> were



TABLE 2

*Commodity Price Indexes for Nova Scotia, 1850-52 & 1871 Compared (Unweighted)*

<i>Type of Prices</i>	<i># of Commodities Included</i>	<i>% Change</i>
Halifax wholesale	76	40.8
Halifax retail	26	34.4
Minas Basin retail	19	29.2
Pictou County retail	22	28.9
Annapolis Basin retail	30	27.1
Average retail	24	29.9

TABLE 3

*Mean Probated & Inventoried Wealth, Nova Scotia 1871  
(constant 1850-52 prices)*

<i>Region</i>	<i>Elite</i>	<i>Farmers</i>	<i>Others</i>	<i>Not Given</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Halifax	\$24,762	\$1,339	\$3,153	\$3,428	\$7,385
Fundy	10,347	1,881	2,583	1,554	3,256
Western	5,223	1,482	532	1,625	2,269
Eastern	5,947	906	686	1,817	1,584
All	11,710	1,412	1,943	2,184	3,588

collected for four price regions: Halifax County, the Annapolis Basin (Digby and Annapolis counties), the Minas Basin (King's, Hants, Colchester and Cumberland counties) and finally for Pictou County. In addition to the use of manuscript business papers, prices were also found for goods annually delivered to the province's insane and poor asylums, and quoted in the *Journals and Proceedings* of the Nova Scotia Assembly. Table 2 contains the details. The Table shows that wholesale prices, which included many export items, moved ahead more significantly than retail prices generally. Fish was not an important retail item, and if all fish prices are removed from the list of wholesale prices, the number of comparable commodities would decline from 76 to 61, and the difference in wholesale prices by 1871 when compared with 1850-52 would fall from 40.8% to 35.7%, a figure which closely approximates the Halifax County unweighted retail price index of 34.4%. If we focus alone on retail commodity prices, it is probably fair to conclude—and this I believe would err on the side of caution—that prices

on average in the province rose by 30% between 1850-52 and 1871. Incidentally, three-quarters of this price rise had occurred by the end of 1862. Prices continued to rise in 1863-64, but then began to move downwards in 1865-69, where they bottomed, before recovering somewhat in 1870-71.

This important evidence was then used to make a true comparison of the probated and inventoried wealth by decedents in 1850-52 and 1871. All amounts arrived at for the 1871 sample were thus deflated by 30%. The results are presented in Table 3. Mean wealth for all probated and inventoried decedent wealth holders thus rose by 43% in the twenty years under study, from \$2,513 to \$3,588, an annual rate of 2.1%. It is very interesting to note that the vast bulk of this increase can be accounted for by the wealth accumulated only by the elite group. Their wealth increased by 58%, or by 2.8% a year between 1850-52 and 1871. By contrast the mean wealth of agriculturalists, owing in part to the sharp decline in wealth of the eastern region, showed no increase over the 1850s and 1860s. According to this sample it actually fell during those two decades in real terms by 7.2%. Mean wealth of Eastern region agriculturalists fell by 32.1%. Even in the Fundy region, most favoured by soil and climatic conditions, mean wealth of the agriculturalists rose by only 6.4% in the two decades, and in the Western region, which had started from a low base in 1850-52, by 9.7%. If wealth accumulated by agriculturalists on average in the 1850s and 1860s appears to have stagnated, that of craftsmen and tradesmen certainly did not. Altogether on average it rose by 30.8%, or about 1.5% per annum in real terms over the two decades, a figure not dissimilar for those whose occupations were not given in the probate records, again largely widowed women, whose mean wealth in real terms rose by 30.6%.

The data show as well that in all social-occupational groups, except for farmers, the highest mean wealth occurred in Halifax County. Fundy economic region followed in almost every instance. Every economic region, except the Eastern, recorded increased overall mean wealth. For Halifax County this was 63.6% in 1871 when compared with 1850-52, 17.4% for the Fundy region, and 23.7% for the Western region. By contrast in the Eastern region, recorded wealth fell on average by 16.4%. It was the wealth of the elite as well as the farmers in the eastern counties which accounted for this apparent setback.

As far as the concept of the golden age is concerned, the term would apply to this era only if we consider an overall annual net increase in mean wealth of just over 2% to merit the adjective "golden." No member of the nineteenth century elite in Nova Scotia or elsewhere in the capitalist world would have subscribed to such an idea. Farmers would perhaps have been content on an annual net yield of 2%, but generally this was far from their actual situation in mid-nineteenth century Nova Scotia. Perhaps independent craftsmen or tradesmen would also have been satisfied with an annual 2% increase in their net real wealth, but few appeared to have enjoyed it over their life cycle, while the average was much less. Thus a study of wealth

simply fails to establish an economic golden age for Nova Scotia in the two decades before 1871.

#### IV

One factor which might well have influenced Nova Scotians from the 1870s onwards to think of their province as having experienced an earlier golden age was the actual discovery and mining of gold in the province. Located first in the wilderness between Ship Harbour and Musquodoboit on the desperately impoverished Eastern Shore in 1860, it began to be processed only in 1862. Between then and the end of 1871 some 192,772 ounces were refined, at the cost of an estimated 2.1 million days' labour, expended by an average of 700 miners each year. With gold then valued at \$18 an ounce, the annual value of this output was approximately \$347,000. Large though this seems, it was a sharply disappointing return, as production peaked in 1867, when some eleven sites were then being mined. By 1871 production had fallen by 30%, not owing to a collapse in the world price of gold, but to the shortage of good quality ore. In comparison to the earlier gold fields discovered in Mexico, Australia and California, the great hopes first placed in Nova Scotia soon evaporated. The development of gold mining provided a brief stimulus to area farmers as far away as Antigonish County, who supplied the Guysborough County diggings, the most enduring in the province. There is little evidence of capitalists making significant profits, despite the gold fever which temporarily gripped many in the province in the mid-1860s.<sup>50</sup> Gold mining in Nova Scotia in the 1860s thus cannot alone provide an adequate reason for considering the era a golden age in the province's economic history.

#### V

By contrast with gold mining, the history of coal production and distribution presents an impressive picture of growth. It influenced Muise to think of this era as a golden age. If we tabulate data for production and sales by two-year averages, beginning in 1850-51, a succession of new peaks was achieved for fifteen years. Only in 1866-67 was there an initial decline recorded in this era. This trough bottomed in 1868-69, before sales rose again to major new heights by 1872-73. When expressed in this aggregated manner or calculated by head of population the rise in production, as in Table 4, is impressive. It rose almost by three times between 1850-51, when it stood at 0.55 per head of population, and 1870-71, when it rose to 1.53 tons per head. This is solid evidence for what economists call intensive growth at least in this aspect of the economy of Nova Scotia.

The principal spin-off came to the carrying trade, in particular for vessels freighting coal to Halifax, New England ports (especially Boston), to New York City and Philadelphia. This subject has yet to find its historian, however obviously important to the region's economy. Langhout and Touseard concluded only that the expansion of coal production in Cape Breton after

TABLE 4

*Nova Scotia's Coal, Sales & Shipped, 1850-51 to 1872-73*  
(two year averages)

Years	Tons	Per Capita	Exports to USA	% of Total
1850-51	151,900	0.55 tons	108,200	71.2
1860-61	319,300	0.99 tons	176,900	55.4
1870-71	582,300	1.53 tons	166,800	28.6

Source: George H. Dobson, *A Pamphlet Compiled and Issued Under the Auspices of the Boards of Trade of Pictou and Cape Breton on the Coal and Iron Industries and their Relation to the Shipping and Carrying Trades of the Dominion* (Ottawa, 1879), 27.

1858 had a deleterious impact upon Cape Breton shipbuilding, and the fleets registered at both Sydney and Arichat declined in size and importance. Langhout found that the end of the General Mining Association's monopoly in 1858 failed to stimulate shipbuilding in Cape Breton, and instead marked a shift in investment from shipping into Sydney area coal mining. Touseard concluded that Arichat shipping declined sharply from 1865. Still, before that occurred Pictou's *Colonial Standard* reported late in 1859 that "a large portion of the shipping of Arichat is engaged in the coal trade. Their vessels take away the last cargoes in the fall of the year, just before the navigation in the harbour [of Pictou] closes. They lay up in the winter in Arichat, and proceed early in the spring with their cargoes of coal for the United States."<sup>51</sup> The freighting of coal, together with the profits, increasingly vanished from the control of Cape Breton interests.<sup>52</sup> In so far as Nova Scotian shipping remained involved, it was increasingly centred in Halifax.

The impact of coal on agriculture appears uncertain. Neither the studies of the Cape Breton economy in the nineteenth century by Hornsby or by Bitterman<sup>53</sup> are particularly impressed by the value of the coal industry to Cape Breton farmers. The farmers of Cape Breton were hard pressed enough even to supply the needs of the poor backlanders on the island. "All in all," Hornsby concluded, "the coal industry had not contributed much to the economy of the Island."<sup>54</sup> Certainly for some, off-farm family income could be generated by work at the coal mines, both above and below ground. Opportunities were limited, and miners soon looked for better situations in the USA, and few ever returned to Cape Breton after that experience. Neither MacNeil, who has studied the agriculture of Pictou and Antigonish to 1861, nor MacKinnon and Wynn, who have analysed Nova Scotia's agriculture in the 1850s, has remarked on the impact of coal mining either on agricultural output or on markets.<sup>55</sup> Stephen Maynard, who studied the village of Hopewell from 1870 to 1890, not far from the Pictou County coalfields, also

attaches little importance to coal's impact on agriculture.<sup>56</sup> It may well have been that the agriculture of Prince Edward Island was the principal beneficiary of Nova Scotia's coal. The Island had a more favourable climate, a far more extensive area of good soil, and a much higher per capita yield for all crops, when compared with Nova Scotia. It is certain only that Nova Scotia provided its coal mines with horses and the hay and oats with which they were fed. How much of the food consumed by the miners—the beef, pork, flour, bread, butter, vegetables, eggs, apples—was the product of Nova Scotia's farms simply has not been estimated; and there is no obvious body of information available to afford a quick and obvious answer.

Other effects of coal mining on the economy of the province can be briefly stated. Obviously the mine props and much of the building materials used at the mines were locally supplied. It might also be supposed that the locally established retail trade in places like New Glasgow would have taken its share of miners' wages, although this matter has yet to be studied. On Cape Breton the establishment of company stores, by the different mining companies, in a monopoly situation certainly was not welcomed by shopkeepers in the area of the coal workings.<sup>57</sup> Doubtless the principal domestic spin-off for Nova Scotia from the great expansion of its coal mines in the 1850s and 1860s was the carrying trade, with its consequent stimulus to Nova Scotia's shipbuilding industry. Yet the marked decline in exports to the USA, in the face of competition from tariff protected American anthracite characteristic of Nova Scotia's coal industry from the end of the Reciprocity Treaty onwards, created much instability in the mid-1860s. This in turn limited the coal's ability to act as an engine for extensive industrialization.<sup>58</sup>

## VI

Historians concerned with shipping and shipbuilding have been the most ready to refer to the third quarter of the nineteenth century as a golden age for the Maritimes. They are impressed by the amount of new tonnage annually built throughout the province in this era. It actually presents quite a different picture from coal output, which as we have seen rose annually until the late 1860s. For shipbuilding between 1848 and 1877-78 there were four distinct cycles, each one somewhat longer than its predecessor, with the peaks of each boom usually higher than earlier peaks. The troughs were equally steep. Such dramatic cyclical shifts were extremely dislocating for workers and capitalists alike. This was especially the case for ships' carpenters, who, in the entire period from 1850 to 1871 experienced at the most five and possibly six full employment years. As investment decisions by shipbuilders were usually taken a year in advance of a vessels' launching, the clustering of volumes for newly-built and registered tonnage does not match the general business cycle. To provide an example: 1851 was a year of high volume for completed ships' tonnage, yet it was one of sharp depression. Such examples can be readily multiplied. Data for tonnage launched, averaged in five-year periods, are found in Table 5. When measured by head of population, the

TABLE 5

*Shipbuilding in Nova Scotia, 1846-1875*  
(Annual average)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Tonnage</i>	<i>Per Capita</i>	<i>Estimated Annual Investment</i>
1846-50	27,300	0.09 tons	\$ 955,500
1851-55	40,800	0.15	1,550,400
1856-60	25,100	0.08	978,900
1861-65	54,000	0.16	2,268,000
1866-70	38,900	0.11	1,517,100

Sources: Public Record Office, CO 221; Nova Scotia Assembly. *Journals and Proceedings*, 1854-68; House of Commons. *Sessional Papers*, 1869-76.

evidence demonstrates little change when 1846-50 is compared with 1866-70, two slack periods, or when 1851-55, 1861-65 and 1871-75, three periods of heightened activity in the industry, are compared. Whether moving toward a peak or descending into a trough, it is obvious that the considerable annual investment in shipbuilding was generally stimulating to lumbering. It is fair to say that almost all, if not all, of the wood used in Nova Scotia-built vessels was obtained within the province, although foreign woods could be imported free of duty. So long as the species of wood favoured by provincial shipbuilders was still available, the bottoms were invariably built of beech, birch and other hardwoods. In the early 1850s, spruce, oak and tamarack were used for the tops, while decks were either of pine or spruce.<sup>59</sup> Rigging was commonly of British manufacture from imported Russian hemp, though with the Reciprocity Treaty some USA-manufactured cordage was used. Sails were made in Nova Scotia from imported English and Scottish canvas, although some cotton sails made in the USA were used in the 1850s and 1860s. For all larger ships, iron anchors and chains of cable were of British manufacture, while wooden blocks and some smaller iron fastenings were normally made in Nova Scotia by this time. Costs, of course, varied from year to year according both to the price of materials and labour. Expectation of improved freight rates was the principal stimulus to new shipbuilding. When freight rates collapsed in the second half of the 1850s, and again from 1865 to 1870, confidence in shipbuilding in Nova Scotia, as elsewhere, largely weakened.<sup>60</sup>

Where was the market for such new ships? In the pamphlet for the Nova Scotian exhibits at the 1860 international exhibition in London, shipbuilding was briefly described. It boasted that "in no country in the world can ships be built so cheaply as in Nova Scotia. Ships from 200 to 500 tons can be



built . . . including rigging from £6 to £7 [sterling=\$30 to \$35] per ton. In many counties the farmers occupy the leisure of winter in building vessels. This is often done by the family—one of which is the blacksmith, others the shipwrights—some haul timber, often cut from their own land ; and the vessel is frequently manned by members of the family."<sup>61</sup> The province was clearly trying to stimulate orders in the British Isles. Yet it is difficult to be accurate about the annual value of newly built ships sold abroad. Details were not recorded until 1853. For 1853–58, for instance, the annual value of such sales was \$553,000, of which \$371,400, or about two-thirds sold in Great Britain and Ireland, and much of the rest to owners elsewhere in British North America.<sup>62</sup> From the late 1850s there was a much diminished market abroad for vessels newly built in Nova Scotia. Builders were forced to retain ownership themselves and speculate in freighting. This part of the industry has been extremely well studied. Let us use, merely by way of example, the case of the Yarmouth fleet. There Alexander and Panting found that about 95% of the ships registered in the port had been built in the province. Indeed no less than 88% of the total had been built in ports of the south western counties of Digby, Yarmouth and Shelburne. By the 1870s, when such vessels were sold they were on average about fifteen years old, which led the authors to conclude that "Yarmouth was not a port which built ships for rapid sale overseas."<sup>63</sup> Earlier in the 1840s, when this had been much less the case, ships when sold were on average only six years old. When such sales occurred in the 1840s, the West Indies had been the principal market, while in the 1850s and 1860s most sales were made either in Belfast or Dublin. With minor variants the story is the same for the other important Nova Scotian ports of registration.

On balance the story for shipbuilding and shipping is a mixed one. There were obviously excellent years for shipbuilders and the skilled workers they employed. These were partially offset by the severely cyclical nature of the industry, in which thousands were thrown out of work, or found work only for a limited time at reduced wages. This was especially the case for most of the 1840s and up to 1853, for the period 1856–61 and from 1865 onwards. We know nothing of shipbuilders' profits in Nova Scotia, or what was considered a reasonable annual rate of return on the investment, a matter still unstudied by scholars. Estimates have been made for annual profits of ship owners from freighting, and these tended to be very impressive, so long as the vessels were employed elsewhere than in the trade of Nova Scotia.<sup>64</sup> The result was that larger Nova Scotian-built vessels, not intended as coasters or for the fish trade, once launched and out to sea, rarely ever again sailed into a Nova Scotian port. What is not known is how much of this wealth accumulated by 1871 was re-invested in the provincial economy.

## VII

One last factor might have induced historians to consider the economic history of Nova Scotia as a golden age before Confederation: the level of

public spending. In the twentieth century we understand in general the importance of public spending to a national or provincial economy, and the levels of taxation needed to sustain it. Earlier in eighteenth-century or nineteenth-century British North America, public spending could be very important to the regional economy.<sup>65</sup> Yet there is no evidence for the 1850s and 1860s that it contributed decisively to Nova Scotia's economic expansion. In the four-year span from 1850 to 1853, the annual average provincial expenditure was about \$443,000. With the advent of the publicly-financed provincial railway, expenditure grew rapidly, and in the four-year interval 1855 to 1858, annual expenditure was \$753,000, a rise of more than 70%.<sup>66</sup> Further expansion of public spending occurred in the early 1860s as debt payments for the railway greatly increased, so that the four-year average for 1862-65 amounted to \$1,139,000, a rise of 157% over 1850-53. Thereafter, owing to the fiscal arrangements at Confederation, by which part of what had been provincial expenditure now became the responsibility of the Dominion, the size of Nova Scotia's spending declined to an average in 1868-71 of just under \$489,000. When adjusted for inflation this was a sum considerably less than twenty years earlier. Inflation adjustments would also significantly reduce figures for 1855-58 and 1862-65.

When the details of this annual expenditure are examined, the only significant new recurring items of expenditure related to the railway.<sup>67</sup> Both in the form of interest payments to provincial bondholders and in net income from operating the railway was the provincial budget affected by the emerging railway system. By the early 1860s interest payments were absorbing about one-fifth of provincial expenditure; and between 1854 and 1867 they amounted to \$1.7 million, when railway revenue exceeded operating expenses by only \$194,000 in total. This expansion of the regional money supply probably added something to inflation and stimulated the economy just at moments in the business cycle when it was not needed, namely during the Crimean War and Civil War booms. The immediate beneficiaries were the railway bondholders, obviously men and women of wealth, and some of them resident in the United Kingdom, where the bulk of the capital was raised through the agency of the Baring Brothers. In so far as bondholders were resident of Nova Scotia, the funds involved simply moved in a circular manner within the economy. Funds to pay the bondholders' interest was collected from taxation, principally from duties on imports, which were paid ultimately by provincial consumers. In so far as the funds raised in this form went to pay ordinary railway construction workers employed by contractors, or the regular employees of the railway, the benefits were more widely diffused. For those outside this still rather narrow circle of the Queen's subjects, there was little evident compensation for the new costs entailed.

There was little in the way of significant new public expenditure in other directions, elsewhere in the province. Some was directed to Cape Breton at the site of St. Peter's canal, and to other public works such as a new wing at the hospital for the insane and for the erection of a new penitentiary, both in Dartmouth. There was, for instance, no striking new energy directed to

road construction to compensate those parts of the province still left out of the railway network. The expanded postal service, a feature of this period, involved the remuneration at a very low level at public expense of those who ran the post and way offices. In addition the discovery of gold initiated a rather expensive, if very limited, increase in public officials. From the mid-1860s education began to receive an increased share of provincial expenditure, with an expanded corps of teachers being the main financial beneficiaries. Yet this small expansion of the provincial bureaucracy amounted to no revolution in government, although, as Langhout believes, increased spending by government on the railway may ultimately have "fostered greater public expectations of government."<sup>68</sup>

It is significant that the private capital then available in Nova Scotia was far too limited either to build and operate the railway from its own capital resources, or even to finance the capital costs by lending the provincial government the major portion of the necessary capital. In this way the building of the railway, far from being an important element of the economic golden age, all too clearly illustrates the limits to the private wealth accumulated by the capitalist class in Nova Scotia, when construction was first undertaken in 1854, and thereafter into the post-Confederation era. As far as railway construction is concerned, this contrasts markedly with the situation in Canada and elsewhere in North America.

## VIII

If the expansion of the coal industry, the deep sea and coastal fleets, the fluctuations in shipbuilding, the discovery of gold and the expansion of provincial spending are important elements in Nova Scotia's economic history in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, what accounts for the relatively modest rise in mean wealth between 1850-52 and 1871, which we have identified? The answer may lie in a study of the standard of living, by comparing wage levels with the price of goods. Did wages keep up with the 30% price inflation or did they lag behind? Information on daily wage rates for men, women and children was only rarely cited in newspapers or in other printed sources in this period. Where such information survives it is to be found in business records. The evidence demonstrates that few occupations experienced a rise in real wages. By real wages we mean money wages adjusted by the rate of inflation. Several occupations actually experienced severe decline in real wages. For instance, the piece rate for weaving homespun fell by 20%. The piece rate for sawing 1,000 feet of pine or other softwood boards fell by almost 30%. Of twenty-four occupations studied, money wages rose by an average of 17.1%, or well under the 30% inflation between 1850-52 and 1871.

As the bulk of those occupations, as determined by the census returns of 1851, 1861 and 1871, were in agriculture, their value to any study of the standard of living is vital. Ten of the twenty-four occupations studied were in agriculture. In them money wages rose by only 11.6% in twenty years,

TABLE 6

*Wages in Agriculture, Nova Scotia 1850-52 & 1871*

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>1850-52</i>	<i>1871</i>	<i>% Change</i>
chopping cordwood	\$0.50	\$0.60	20.0
digging potatoes	0.70	0.80	14.3
fencing	0.60	0.80	33.3
hauling with cart & horse	1.20	1.20	—
haying	0.75	0.80	6.7
mowing	0.80	0.90	12.5
planting & hoeing	0.50	0.70	40.0
ploughing with horse	1.00	1.00	—
reaping	0.80	0.80	—
threshing	0.50	0.60	20.0
Average (unweighted):	\$0.735	\$0.82	11.6

far below the 30% inflation in prices. Table 6 provides details. There were examples of real wage gains in the 1850s, but few in the 1860s. Whatever had been gained earlier, in 1854-55 for instance, was subsequently lost in the price rise of the 1862-64 boom. Both wages and prices then fell in the recession which set in during 1865-66. The information on agricultural labour means that, if an average day's work saw a rise in money wages of only \$0.085 in twenty years, this meant a decline in real wages from \$0.735 in 1850-52 to only \$0.49 by 1871. This sharp decline in purchasing power for ordinary unskilled workers in Nova Scotia constituted a serious crisis everywhere in the province.

What of the occupations outside agriculture? Daily wages of the common labourer, for instance, which had been \$0.60 in 1850-52, reached \$1.00 in 1862, yet fell back to the range of \$0.50 to \$0.80 in 1866-69, before rising again to \$1.00 in 1870-73. Yet when the 30% inflation is taken into account, the \$1.00 a day money wage in 1871 meant only \$0.70 in 1850-52 purchasing power for commodities, a mere \$0.10 higher or a 16.7% increase in real wages in twenty years. Skilled workers, such as bricklayers, saw their real wages rise to \$1.26 in 1871 from \$1.20 in 1850-52, a rise of merely 5% in two decades. Girls in domestic service in 1850-52 received their room, board and \$2.00 monthly, or \$0.08 a day. In 1871 the wage was normally \$3.00 a month, or \$0.12 a day. This amounted to a 50% rise in money wages, but only \$0.10 a month or 5% in real wages. One of the few other occupations which managed to keep up with inflation was that of teaching. In 1850-52 the average annual wage for teachers, men and women taken together, was \$144,

a sum then reckoned to be inadequate. By 1871 it had risen to an average of \$207.30, although most women teachers received far less than this. When inflation is calculated, the average 1871 wage was \$145.11, or just fractionally above that of the \$144 their colleagues had received twenty years earlier. One of the few examples of women's waged work for which information survives relates to washerwomen, who in 1850-52 earned \$0.25 a day, which by 1871 had risen to \$0.30, a real wage of only \$0.21, significantly below the earlier level. In this general failure of so many waged workers to find protection against the effects of inflation Nova Scotians were not unlike many people elsewhere in North America. Yet here the skilled and the unskilled, male and female together, adults and children remained as unorganized in the workplace in 1871 as they had been earlier in the century. They were still quite incapable of converting the alternating phases of the business cycle in any way to their collective and permanent advantage. There were instances of skilled workers receiving increases in daily wages during the booms of 1854 and 1862-64, but these were lost in the subsequent recessions. For those less well placed in the labour force, the result in this era was a generally serious and occasionally catastrophic decline in their living standards, even when they found waged employment.

## IX

The case of the farm workers, who did worse than most, is of special interest as it raises the whole matter of the relative economic state of the province's agriculture at this time. It is generally agreed that, owing to the very serious difficulties faced by farmers in the 1840s, arising from the widespread potato blight and the infestation of the Hessian fly in wheat growing areas, output from these two crops was significantly lower than it might otherwise have been. Farm income was also consequently eroded. The impoverishment of families, who were especially dependent on the potato, appears to have led to a flight from the land, so far best documented among the backlanders of Cape Breton. In the 1850s and 1860s the agriculture of Nova Scotia suffered no such disasters; nor were there any unusual climatic reasons to cause special concern, only the normal cycle of occasionally excessively dry or unusually wet growing seasons.

If we compare the agricultural census data gathered in 1851 and 1871 for the years 1850 and 1870, we have some bases for useful comparisons. Neither growing season was particularly good, though in 1850 the impact of the Hessian fly and the potato blight was still being partially felt. The details are found in Table 7. A sustained turnabout began only in 1853, but agricultural prices only rose significantly in the Crimean War boom of 1854. They peaked again only during the Civil War.

The picture which emerges from this information is mixed. If production figures are an accurate guide, there was neither an agricultural revolution between 1850 and 1870 nor even a period of 'high' agriculture in the Victorian sense. Production of peas and corn, turnips and other roots declined

TABLE 7  
*Nova Scotia's Agriculture, 1851 & 1871*  
 (measured per capita)

Item	1851		1871		% Change	
	#	p.c.	#	p.c.	#	p.c.
Grain [bush]	2,109,400	7.6	2,981,900	7.7	41.4	1.3
Peas & corn [bush]	59,100	0.2	43,000	0.1	(27.2)	(50.0)
Hay [tons]	287,800	1.0	443,700	1.1	54.2	10.0
Potatoes [bush]	1,986,800	7.2	5,561,000	14.3	179.9	98.6
Other roots [bush]	499,400	1.8	618,900	1.6	(23.9)	(11.1)
Butter & cheese [lbs]	5,140,800	18.8	8,046,800	20.8	56.5	10.6
Horses & cattle [no.]	272,600	1.0	323,600	0.8	18.7	(15.2)
Pigs & sheep [no.]	333,700	1.2	452,600	1.2	35.6	(3.1)



absolutely, while the livestock, whether horses or cattle, pigs or sheep, when measured against the increase of Nova Scotia's population, declined relatively. Yet there were absolute and relative increases in aggregate grain output, as well as in potatoes, butter and cheese. It was the expansion of acreage in oats that accounted for the improvement in grain production. The most significant gain was in potato output, yet the crop was less than 50% larger than it had been when the 1827 census had surveyed agriculture in the province. According to the census returns, improved land had expanded from 799,300 acres in 1851 to 1,627,100 acres in 1871, or some 827,800 acres. There are, according to modern ARDA soil surveys, only about 410,000 acres of good agricultural soil out in the province.<sup>69</sup> As MacKinnon and Wynn have shown that all of this land formed part of the improved land noted in the 1851 census, then the newly reported improved land in 1871 would have been little more than very rough pasture created when the forest had been cleared, something that was occurring at an enormous pace both in Cape Breton and peninsular Nova Scotia in the intervening years.<sup>70</sup> The same census returns and the reports of the county agriculture societies indicate a very modest increase in the use of machinery to replace agricultural labour between 1851 and 1871. Improving farmers, even hundreds of them, are known to have existed. Their labours, with favourable soil conditions, generally suitable climate and their own business acumen, certainly wrung profits from some of the land, although there is little detailed manuscript evidence for this. As it was not these about whom contemporaries chose to comment, there seem to be no compelling reasons why historians should single out for special consideration what were clearly exceptions to the general pattern in Nova Scotia's agriculture.

By 1871 it was no better placed to meet the needs of the province than it had been earlier in the century. At the same time agricultural items formed but a small element in the province's exports, and displayed no capacity to expand, when measured against its own growing population. Details are found in Table 8. They show how exports of livestock stagnated from the late 1840s to the early 1870s, while no other farm produce, except the butter and eggs, was of any export significance. From being a net exporter of cheese in the 1840s, by the early 1870s, Nova Scotia was a net importer. Despite increased grain production, her dependence on external supplies of both grain (principally from Prince Edward Island) and flour (principally from the USA) had significantly grown, while she had found no substitute for imported American rice. Despite the expansion of her livestock between 1850 and 1870 she had become dependent on external supplies of lard, and to a greater extent than her butter exports had grown.

Had agriculture prospered and helped create a golden age, it would have been reflected in agricultural wages. These would not have remained in real terms at levels by 1871 far below those of 1850-52. Let us look at perhaps the most skilled task in the farming year, and one reckoned to be the heaviest, that of the mower with his scythe. To mow hay in 1850-52 a man was paid \$0.80, a depressed wage, for from the 1790s until the mid-1830s it had paid

TABLE 8

*Nova Scotia's Agricultural Net Exports, 1847-48 & 1869-71*

<i>Item</i>	<i>1847-48</i>	<i>1869-71</i>
livestock*	6,300	6,500
butter [lbs]	453,900	522,700
cheese [lbs]	16,600	** (32,500)
lard [lbs]	(32,500)	(222,100)
meat [cwt]	(2,800)	(5,200)
fresh fruit [bbls]	1,700	(2,100)
cider [bbls]	550	(400)
eggs [doz]	34,800	226,000
vegetables [bush]	24,700	13,800
grain [bush]	(131,000)	(251,000)
flour & meal [bbl]	(196,000)	(164,000)
hay [tons]	200	900
hops [lbs]	—	(19,000)
wool [lbs]	—	(4,700)
rice [cwt]	(4,600)	(4,425)

\* Some 60% were sheep and much of the rest were cattle.

\*\* amounts in brackets are net imports (exports less imports).

Source: PRO, CUST 12/16-17; CO 221/61-62; Canada. *Sessional Papers*.

between \$1.00 and \$1.20. There are few instances of this wage being paid in the 1850s or 1860s, and in 1871 \$0.90 was usual. In real terms this meant \$0.63 in 1850-52 values, less than what a common labourer in Halifax and many other places received. If digging potatoes was less skilled than mowing, it was a heavy and much dirtier task. The daily wage rose only \$0.10 in twenty years, but in real terms the wage had fallen from \$0.70 to \$0.56 a day. Harder hit by inflation and the failure of agricultural wages to keep abreast of it were those who brought their own horse and cart to work on someone else's farm. They failed to attract any increase in the daily wage of \$1.20, but as a consequence saw their real wage drop to \$0.84, and they still had to feed the horse and maintain the cart in good order.

Although the agricultural societies were full of enthusiasm and could occasionally point to real improvements in crop yields or quality of livestock, less partial observers found little reason for encouragement. Duncan Campbell, whose task it became to find out the labour needs of the various

regions within the province and try and fill them, was extremely critical of farmers generally. For instance, when he visited Pictou County and Cape Breton Island in 1867, he reported discouragingly to the Assembly. Pictou he called "a pre-eminently agricultural county and which, although the earliest peopled by Scotsmen, yet remains comparatively in primitive barrenness."<sup>71</sup> By the farmers of Cape Breton he was even more upset. He found they cultivated "just as much soil, as a general rule, as yields bare subsistence."<sup>72</sup> More than 20% of all Cape Breton farmers worked the land as squatters having no valid title from the crown. After two generations he found the Highland farmer had made no "marked progress in the cultivation of the soil . . . from want of education, or in other words, their ignorance." The original settlers had been illiterate, and illiteracy continued among them.

Illiteracy was merely a symptom of their poverty. Two-thirds of the farms had been established on hopelessly inadequate backlands. As such farms produced so little, families had to work off the farm for perhaps two-thirds of the year to earn wages to sustain themselves. It was these very poor families who were the principal market for the better off frontland farmers who supplied the hay, oats and replacement livestock which they needed each year. There was a quickly reached upper limit on prices such families could pay, which restricted the frontland farmer from earning a reasonable return in such a market. Elsewhere Cape Breton farmers had to compete with the better situated farmers on Prince Edward Island or in Pictou and Antigonish counties for the very limited markets at St. John's in Newfoundland, in the small urban population of Cape Breton itself and in the Halifax-Dartmouth region. Only in such places was there hope of bringing an adequate return for their surpluses.

The solution for many backlanders lay in abandoning their holdings. Some tried the coal mines or entered as crew on ships. The ones who made the largest impression on their contemporaries were those who left the province altogether. By the Dominion census of 1871 some 9,400 Nova Scotia-born natives lived either in Ontario, Quebec or New Brunswick, while the 1870 US census had located some 52,500 Nova Scotians within its territories.<sup>73</sup> Everywhere the explanation for the exodus was the same as it had been before 1853: "the scarcity of employment at home at remunerating wages . . . and the high rate of wages which obtains abroad."<sup>74</sup> In the very midst of what has so erroneously been called the golden age this explanation was repeated by many newspapers in most years between 1850 and 1871. Economists find nothing strange in this population flow from areas of low demand and hence low wages to areas of high demand and relatively high wages. Yet as a correspondent from Boston wrote in Halifax's *Evening Express and Commercial Reporter* in 1859, "there is something radically wrong when thousands of her people become voluntary exiles at once impoverishing their own country."<sup>75</sup> At the end of the war-induced boom in the spring of 1865, the *Acadian Recorder* again wrote of the departure of the "bone and sinew"<sup>76</sup> of Nova Scotia, its young and its fit, which for the previous twenty years at least had been leaving in such great numbers. Had they stayed there might

have been social revolution, but it is unlikely they would have done more than add to the poverty of the province. It was a depressing tale which was not confined to the agricultural districts of Nova Scotia.

## X

It is especially difficult to reconcile the idea of the golden age with an analysis of the fisheries of Nova Scotia. It was widely believed, as Duncan Campbell remarked in 1873, that "in point of importance and value the fisheries of Nova Scotia take precedence of all other immediate interests."<sup>77</sup> It was an understandable exaggeration for fish products loomed large in Nova Scotia's export values, while the needs of the fisheries also accounted for a significant share of the province's imports. Gross agricultural production was probably more important, but as we have seen, it was only a small aspect of external trade, and was overlooked by comparison.

There were two principal groups involved in the fisheries. On the one hand were the relatively few wholesale fish merchants, mainly in Halifax but also found in important centres like Arichat, Canso, Lunenburg, Yarmouth and Digby. On the other were the several thousand individuals who, when the census was taken in 1851, 1861 and 1871, described themselves as fishermen. In 1851 they numbered around 10,000 and by 1871 over 19,000. The fish merchants were among the most substantial men of wealth in the province, linked with the financial institutions and the legislature. The fishermen were, in the words of the *Acadian Recorder* in 1858 "the most wretchedly poor of any class in the whole province."<sup>78</sup> In two long editorials, the paper made an effort, as serious as it was rare, to understand and describe the situation as it then existed in Nova Scotia:

Real suffering poverty is but little known in Nova Scotia, except in those shore counties where fishing is the main dependence of the people for a livelihood. There poverty might almost be declared the rule, rather than the exception. Year after year we have been accustomed to hear the most heartrending tales of physical destitution and suffering from those Atlantic shore districts, and to see the charitable sending their contributions to rescue these unfortunate people from starvation. Year after year, with occasional intermissions, their lamentation is brought before the legislature, that relief may be granted from the Provincial treasury.

The paper noted that it was at the personal risk and on the backs of such "poverty-stricken fishermen" that some of the "most considerable private fortunes amassed in Nova Scotia are traceable," and it was certain it knew the cause of the "wretched condition of most of the fishermen." It stopped short of accusing the merchants of "designedly" oppressing them, by "wringing the greatest possible amount of profit for themselves out of their labour." Yet the results were the same. The load of debt which the fishermen carried made them resemble blacks on plantations in the US South: "disheartened, evincing no degree of energy, prudence and ingenuity," the

very qualities needed to break out of the "chronic poverty and misery" which engulfed their families. If the system continued this "most illiterate class" in Nova Scotia would remain "the poorest in the land."

The paper castigated what it termed the "puny efforts hitherto made for developing what is very early the first in importance among the industrial resources" of the province. The Assembly rejected the policy of bounties to fishermen based on the size of their catch, as fish merchants clamoured for a bounty only for the amount of fish exported, in which they alone were concerned. Such subsidies for fishermen were then commonplace in the Netherlands, Norway, France, Great Britain and the USA. In general their purpose, as the *Halifax Evening Express* explained was to enable such men "to obtain outfits for the first voyage in the spring without being under any degrading compliment to the merchant."<sup>79</sup> If free of such initial debts, fishermen would soon attract sufficient capital to build a better class of fishing vessel than was commonly then found either in the inshore fishery or on the banks and the Gulf of Saint Lawrence. Without help, the typical Nova Scotian fishing vessel would remain a "fleet of misshapen, diminutive and crazy 'strawberry barks' in which the lives of our fishermen are entrusted . . . a positive disgrace to the province."<sup>80</sup> This contrasted poorly with the "noble fleet of American craft" in which the New England fishermen put to sea.

There was one attempt in this period to launch a modern fishing company. In 1852 the Louisbourg Fishing Company planned to raise \$80,000 as a joint stock, limited liability company. Newspapers carried the letters of N.H. Martin, the entrepreneur, and gave him every encouragement. Public meetings were held. A bill was drafted and passed through all stages of the legislative process. Yet other capitalists stood aside, and failed in sufficient numbers to subscribe the necessary funds. Martin's hope of teaching fishermen "to be fishermen indeed"<sup>81</sup> vanished with the rest of his scheme, not to be attempted elsewhere in the province again in the 1850s and 1860s.

The fisheries of Nova Scotia depended on two principal markets, the traditional market in the Caribbean and a newer market which had begun to develop in the 1840s in the USA. The West Indies were the main market for the so called saltfish or dry cod. Nova Scotia's exports worldwide of this commodity were surpassed in volume only by Newfoundland and Norway. Whereas these principal competitors catered to the European and Brazilian markets, which were increasingly well placed to pay higher prices for this commodity, Nova Scotia's customers were poor blacks. This was the case whether the customers were the ex-slaves of post-emancipation British West Indies, or the still enslaved Spanish islands.<sup>82</sup> The Spanish sugar islands were the richer, as their economies, especially that of Cuba, prospered with the continued use of slaves. Yet this was the less significant part of the Nova Scotian market in the West Indies. The principal share of her fish was taken by the increasingly impoverished British West Indies, whose share of the world's sugar market slipped, especially after the lowering of protective tariffs in the United Kingdom in the late 1840s.<sup>83</sup> With such impoverished customers,



the ceiling on dry cod would always be lower than in Europe and would always quickly be reached.<sup>84</sup> Nova Scotia's merchants, who shipped cod, thus specialized in the poorest quality, the so-called West India grade. There were exceptions, of which the best known are perhaps the Jersey firms based on Isle Madame and at Cheticamp in Cape Breton who shipped both to Europe and Brazil. In general the Nova Scotia fisherman could expect only very low prices for his catch of the low grade West India cod. The usual Halifax merchant bought from fishermen whom in the spring he had outfitted with imported salt, tackle, nets, rigging, ironware, tea, flour, sugar, barrelled pork and beef. As Nova Scotia's fishermen never caught enough to supply the province's cod markets, so annually the fish merchants imported substantial quantities, especially from Newfoundland. And in the mid-1860s this amounted to between \$425,000 and \$550,000 a year, or from 5% to 5.5% of the total value of all imports.<sup>85</sup>

It was the USA market which held out more hope for Nova Scotians involved in the fisheries. Here was a market more like that of Europe, composed of those who could be presumed able to pay decent prices for all sea products. The difficulty for Nova Scotians, as for other potential suppliers from British North America, was that such imports into the USA, except during the years of the Reciprocity Treaty, were subject to protective tariffs. There was a market in the USA only when the extensive New England fishing fleet itself failed to make a sufficient catch of mackerel, herring and salmon, the most valued species. Under the conditions which characterized relations between the USA and Nova Scotia in the 1850s and 1860s, the Americans were at least as well situated as were the Nova Scotian fishermen themselves to catch all but salmon. The Americans were aided not only by the admitted superiority of their vessels, but by the fact that up to 25% of their annual crews of between 15,000 and 16,000 were themselves experienced fishermen from Nova Scotia. This was the estimate of Paul Crowell when he reported to the Assembly, "Some leave their homes in the spring of the year and take passage for the United States for employment. Others ship on American vessels when they arrive in Nova Scotia."<sup>86</sup> During the Reciprocity Treaty sea products from Nova Scotia valued at \$700,000 a year were shipped to the USA.<sup>87</sup> The US Consul in Halifax confidently reported in 1871 almost five years after the abrogation of the Treaty that the "value and extent of this market for the colonial fisheries have not materially affected . . . Since that period most all descriptions of colonial fish have continued to command in the American markets remunerative prices notwithstanding the duties imposed by the United States tariff. Mackerel especially have within the past few years steadily advanced in price within the provincial and American markets."<sup>88</sup> This was inaccurate. The wholesale price in 1871 of Mackerel No. 1, the best and most highly valued grade, was 85% above that of 1850-52; but almost none was supplied that year from Nova Scotia, while Mackerel No. 2 was 1.5% below and Mackerel No. 3 some 28.4% below their average 1850-52 wholesale prices. The Consul's remarks were based on the high prices for 1867-1870, when the mackerel catch, which normally



constituted 80% of the value of sales in the USA, had been disasterously small, driving into further poverty the thousands of inshore fishermen who depended on it. The abundant mackerel catch of 1871, confined as it was to the lower grades, sent wholesale prices plunging adding almost as much to the fisherman's miseries, however much it altered the profits of fish merchants.

The evidence indicates that even had the Americans been excluded from those fisheries favoured by the Nova Scotians, the bluenosers would have been poorly placed to expand their annual catch. There was at that time a decided drift to the inshore fishery, a certain sign of poverty and under capitalization, when the fish stocks of the deep sea banks remained undiminished. The situation would have improved only had merchants with capital departed from their long reluctance to play other than a commercial role. Had they instead integrated their operations by investing in fishing vessels, and sharing in an equitable manner the value of the catch with the fishermen, there would have been some serious prospect of an economic recovery in the Nova Scotia fishery, something which clearly did not occur by the beginning of the 1870s, despite the establishment of a new processing business involving the canning of salmon and lobster.

A summary of the province's exports of sea products during the two decades under study is provided in Table 9. From it one can detect only a marginal increase in the per capita export of dry cod, even as the quantity increased by 163,000 barrels over twenty years. From data going back to the 1820s there was equally little evidence of intensive growth in this crucially important trade commodity. Exports merely expanded at the same rate as Nova Scotia's population increased. For all other species, sold by the barrel, a disappointingly small growth in exports in two decades resulted in a sharp relative decline, when measured by population.

However well the fish merchant's survived, whether the wholesale prices were high or low, is not central to our consideration. Rather it is the plight of the fishermen which should help determine the appropriateness of the concept of the golden age. Among the many committees spawned from time to time by the Assembly, one was a 1868 Committee on Fishermen's Relief. After careful enquiry it satisfied itself that by February there existed "among the fishing populations of Digby, Yarmouth, Shelburne, Queen's, Lunenburg, Halifax, Guysborough, Antigonish and Cape Breton, great and widespread distress and destitution."<sup>89</sup> It expected the serious conditions to last at least until the end of May. It warned that "unless extensive and permanent arrangements be made, many may perish from starvation." The Assembly allocated \$22,000 for distribution in the counties worst affected, the largest sum hitherto voted for such relief. Yet nothing of fundamental importance for the fisheries was even considered. No fisheries bureaucracy had ever been established, as was done in the early 1860s to superintend the gold fields, whose value to the provincial economy was so marginal. Whereas gold production was reported on annually in remarkable detail, the usual report by the Assembly fisheries committee, by contrast, only underlines its neglect

TABLE 9  
*Nova Scotia's Exports of Sea Products, 1850-52 & 1871*

Item	1850-52		1871		% Change	
	#	p.c.	#	p.c.	#	p.c.
Cod, dry [bbls]	287,800	1.08	450,800	1.16	56.6	7.4
Other species [bbls]	183,000	0.66	200,400	0.52	9.5	(21.2)
Salmon & lobster [cans]	—	—	1,006,500	2.60	—	—

Sources: PRO, CUST 12/19-21; Canada. *Sessional Papers*.

by provincial politicians. Curiously it was only after Confederation, when it became a responsibility of the Dominion government, that the fisheries of Nova Scotia began to receive the attention they deserved with remarkably detailed annual reporting.

When the catch was poor, the fishermen and their families were thrown upon the charitable impulses of their neighbours and of nearby townsfolk where they went begging every winter. In years when the catch was abundant, success glutted his market thereby depressing prices. Although the system which tied the poor fisherman to the wealthy merchant-supplier was not confined to Nova Scotia—it has been extensively studied for Newfoundland—no alternative was considered. For Nova Scotia nothing had changed in the twenty years of this supposed golden age. Nothing indeed had changed since the arrival of Loyalists in the 1780s, when an extensive fishery based on well-settled Nova Scotia had been first established.

## XI

The *Queen's Quarterly* in 1969 published an article entitled "A New Golden Age of Maritime Historiography." It brought attention to the fact that much of the better historical writing about the Maritimes had focused on the era before Confederation. It sensed that a new dawn was breaking, after which the more recent history of the Maritimes would become the major focus of younger scholars. When the author, George Rawlyk, briefly surveyed the work of earlier historians, he touched upon their concept of a golden age in the pre-Confederation maritime colonies. It was an "escape-valve" they badly needed, he concluded.<sup>90</sup>

The concept of an economic golden age, at least as far as Nova Scotia is concerned, has become as mischievous as it is distracting. If that first generation of post-Confederation maritime historians needed that concept, scholars writing now should free themselves of the tyranny of this particular myth. Doubtless there were men in Nova Scotia who did well in the 1850s and 1860s and regretted the passing of the era. They were wealthy and few. Their regret stemmed, not from the prospect of bankruptcy in the 1870s, but from their foreshortened economic prospects. Ship owners, for example, used to perhaps 15% or 20% annual returns on investment, would now have to accept possibly only 4% or 5%, if they were to stay in shipping. It was a grave and unwanted alteration to their prospects. When a significant group among the privileged find themselves in such situations, they invariably react strongly. Occasionally they ignite a conservative revolution. In the 1860s and 1870s in Nova Scotia they established no Committees of Safety. Yet many among them saw the end of Reciprocity and the beginning of Confederation much more as a threat than a challenge, and hence opposed the latter being powerless to do anything about the former. The golden age in this way remains a class specific concept, which perhaps has utility today only for those who write the history of the private fortunes in this elite class of merchants, gentlemen, bankers, colliery owners, ship owners, shipbuilders

and master mariners. It becomes mischevious if it is employed as a generalization for an entire people, whatever their class, many of whom endured appalling social deprivation, which endured into the twentieth century.

Outside parts of the coal industry and shipowning (especially on routes far from Nova Scotia), there is little evidence to support the idea of an economic golden age for most Nova Scotians. There was none for fishermen, none for backland farmers in Cape Breton and thousands of others who farmed marginal land, from the blacks of Guysborough County to the Acadians of Yarmouth County. There was no golden age for the thousands of agricultural labourers even on the most fertile soils of Annapolis, Kings, Hants, Colchester and Cumberland counties. Except the widows of the wealthy, there was none for women. There were a few good years for those who worked in shipbuilding or in the building trades. There was steady, dangerous and harsh employment but no golden age for seamen, whose miserable wages, not having changed in years, were much diminished by inflation.<sup>91</sup> Indeed for most of those in receipt of daily wages of piecework rates, inflation undid in the 1860s whatever gains had been recorded earlier in the 1850s. The continuous advance of coal production provided only low-wage employment for miners who, when given the opportunity, departed for the better wages in the USA. For gold miners there was little but disappointments.

The marked decline in real wages, a feature especially evident after 1864, deserves serious attention for it constituted a large social and economic crisis. It resulted in no rebellion, as had the agricultural crisis of the 1830s in Quebec. The largely unorganized working class remained as vulnerable to capitalists in 1871 as they had been in 1851. The only known strikes, those of coal miners, were dealt with by mine owners with the aid of the military, without making concessions in wages or working conditions.<sup>92</sup> Here the decisions to emigrate taken by thousands of Nova Scotians were crucial. This was the safety valve which helped diminish social tensions in Nova Scotia. The exodus which had characterized the years of depression in the 1840s, made worse by the potato blight, had continued into the early 1850s. It had diminished briefly in the mid-1850s, to resume when the economy faltered from 1856 onwards, and did not end until 1862, when the economy began to build to a boom. After three successive years of apparently full employment and temporary prosperity, the economy slipped into recession from 1865-66 to 1869-70, which once again opened the floodgates to emigration. This, and not any golden age, was the most important socio-economic phenomenon for Nova Scotia in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.

It doubtless coloured the political views of many. Indeed perhaps the only extensive indication of social unrest was found in the uncommonly widespread opposition in Nova Scotia to Confederation. It is after all something remarkable that the rhetoric of the debate over Confederation clearly found a deep resonance among so many. They may or may not have understood the constitutional and political reasons promulgated against the scheme, of which

the complaint of lack of consultation appears to have been the most persuasive. They may or may not have taken satisfaction from the rather paltry fiscal adjustments which the political elite in Nova Scotia on the whole was so quick to accept from a largely unsympathetic Dominion government. This we do not, and perhaps, cannot know. Yet there was good cause to believe that Confederation would make even more difficult the serious economic straits in which they increasingly found themselves from 1865 onwards. They did not rebel to form an independent state, nor did they press for union with the USA. Instead many simply departed. For those who remained the continuous psychological wounding, through the loss from emigration of children and grandchildren, brothers and sisters, cousins and friends, assuredly marked that generation of Nova Scotians.

It is from the study of these important issues, and the underlying economic difficulties, that the adoption of the elite view of a lost golden age has distracted historians. From the viewpoint of the economic historian, the world of the 1870s was not unlike that of the 1850s and 1860s. There was no great demarcation point. The booms and depressions of the post-Confederation era formed part of the same continuum within the Atlantic economic world, of which Nova Scotia had long been a part. Rather the difference between pre-1845 and post-1865 Nova Scotia seems less economic than psychological. In the earlier period, the colony still attracted new settlers in relatively large numbers, although it had suffered some emigration. Generally, commentators had written and spoken of Nova Scotia as if she were still young, vigorous and full of hope. Whatever collective faults she manifested could surely be overcome. "What prevents this Province" the *Yarmouth Tribune* had written impatiently in 1856:

from treading in the footsteps of her illustrious parent? What prevents this land from becoming the seat of prosperous manufactories of a far-spreading and life-giving commerce—of a teeming, energetic and happy population? Nothing that we know of, except the inveterate propensity of certain of our countrymen to fling themselves beneath the chariot wheels of progress, in the vain expectation of utterly checking their advance. One might as well try and stop an avalanche as to stay the progress of that movement which is destined to elevate Nova Scotia to a proud position among the Provinces and States of this continent. Nothing but the most unaccountable apathy could have hindered her from long before assuming such a position.<sup>93</sup>

A month earlier by contrast the *Acadian Recorder* rather soberly had described Nova Scotia as "a third rate British colony."<sup>94</sup> By the early 1870s Nova Scotia seemed set on becoming at best a second-rate Canadian province. It was now attractive to very few. The only new settlers were the very poor Newfoundland fishermen of Irish stock who settled, unnoticed by officials, in Inverness County,<sup>95</sup> together with a few English families, whom the agents of the provincial government were able to convince to try agriculture in Nova Scotia before moving elsewhere. Such small and isolated accretions were

overborne by the thousands of permanent departures which were experienced by every one of the eighteen counties in Nova Scotia. A sense of youthful hope had given way, certainly among those who departed, to a less varnished understanding of the evident economic limitations of pre-industrial Nova Scotia. For most who remained behind to be ravished by further series of economic setbacks induced by the great and increasing magnitude of the business cycle, there were blighted hopes, an abiding poverty and a not surprising general defensiveness, which in part took the form of replacing disquieting historical experience with soothing myths.

## NOTES

1. Earlier versions of this paper were read at the Atlantic Canada Workshop, Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Sept. 30th, 1989, and much more fully at a seminar for the Halifax Social History Group, Dalhousie University, Dec. 13th, 1989. I am grateful on both those occasions to participants for their comments, which have resulted in alterations to the text. The epigraph is from John Guy, "The Tudor Age (1485-1603)" in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Britain*, edited by Kenneth O. Morgan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 223.
2. See M. Brook Taylor, *Promoters, Patriots, and Partisans. Historiography in Nineteenth-Century English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), esp. chapter 6, "The Maritime Opt Out" where the creations of pre-Confederation golden ages by historians in each of the Maritime provinces in the post-Confederation era is described. Such historians were invariably opposed to Confederation, thereby giving it a poor reputation from its very birth. Some of Nova Scotia's politicians in the post-Confederation era used the term. Archibald MacMechan, the regional historian, used the phrase "Golden Age of Halifax in trade" only for the period of the war with the United States in 1812-1815 in "Halifax in Trade" *Canadian Geographical Journal*, Vol. III (September 1931), 156. I have not found the term in the published works of the influential historian and archivist D.C. Harvey.
3. In a paper delivered by Del Muise before the Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society, 14 April 1967, printed in *Collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society*, Vol. 36 (1968), 328.
4. See Charles Armour and Thomas Lackey, *Sailing Ships of the Maritime*, (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1975). In Eric W. Sager and Lewis R. Fischer, *Shipping and Shipbuilding in Atlantic Canada 1820-1914* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association Booklet No. 42, 1986), 3. It was Maritimers themselves who "put an end to the golden age of sail" when they became increasingly reluctant to re-invest in shipping in the 1870s. The term was not used by Frederick William Wallace, *Wooden Ships and Iron Men* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1924), a valuable and influential book, despite its focus on shipowners and shipmasters.
5. *Acadian Recorder*, 26 Dec. 1863.
6. John G. Reid, *Six Crucial Decades. Times of Change in the History of the Maritimes*. (Halifax: Nimbus, 1987) believes that the idea of a golden age is "not an entirely foolish notion," 97, though some groups failed to prosper. Robert MacKinnon and Graeme Wynn, "Nova Scotian Agriculture in the 'Golden Age': A New Look" in *Geographical Perspectives on the Maritime Provinces*, edited by Douglas Day (Halifax: Saint Mary's University Press, 1988), 47-59, assume the notion is appropriate, while advancing evidence to demonstrate that farmers then were more than merely the "rude half lumberer half farmer" described by contemporaries.
7. The comment, "Poor old Nova Scotia, God help her!" was made in March 1866. See J. Murray Beck, "Joseph Howe" *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. X (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 368.



8. 31 Dec. 1853.
9. 7 Dec. 1854.
10. As an example see the commentary on 27 May 1854.
11. 18 Nov. 1854.
12. Nova Scotia Assembly. *Journals and Proceedings*, for 1865, Appx. 15, p. 3, 26 Jan. 1865. Woodgate's data showed a rise in the number of post offices from 51 to 75, and in way offices from 169 to 431, while annual revenues had almost doubled to just under \$50,000, and the annual deficit had also risen by 60% to almost \$21,000.
13. 22 Feb. 1854.
14. 12 July 1855.
15. 14 Sept. 1864.
16. *Yarmouth Herald*, 21 Sept. 1864.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Yarmouth Tribune*, 10 Aug. 1864.
20. 14 Sept. 1864.
21. 19 July 1866. Consult also the *Amherst Gazette*, 20 July 1866 and the *Berwick Star*, 19 July 1866. See as well Allan Brookes, "Family, Youth and Leaving Home in Late Nineteenth Century Rural Nova Scotia: Canning and the Exodus, 1868-1893" in *Childhood and Family in Canadian History*, edited by Joy Parr (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982), 93-108.
22. 14 Sept. 1864.
23. *Yarmouth Herald*, 26 Oct. 1864.
24. *The Weekly Register* [Bridgetown], 11 Sept. 1862.
25. "Building Halifax, 1841-1871" *Acadiensis*, Vol. 10 (Autumn 1980), 90-112.
26. 3 Oct. 1865.
27. *Ibid.*
28. 7 June 1852.
29. 13 June 1860.
30. 1 Jan. 1853.
31. 7 Aug. 1856. Letter to the editor by one who signed himself, 'Pay-as-You-Go.'
32. Consult D. Morier Evans, *The History of the Commercial Crisis, 1857-1858 and the Stock Exchange Panic of 1859* (London: 1859); Samuel Reznick, "The Influence of the Depression upon American Opinion, 1857-1859" *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. II (May 1942), 1-23; George W. Van Vleck, *The Panic of 1857. An Analytical Study* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943); James L. Huston, *The Panic of 1857 and the Coming of the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987).
33. 21 Oct. 1857.
34. 29 Oct. 1857.
35. 2 Jan. 1858.
36. 31 Dec. 1858.
37. 27 July 1861.
38. 10 Aug. 1861.
39. Warren M. Persons, Pierson M. Tuttle & Edwin Frickey, "Business and Financial Conditions Following the Civil War in the United States" *Review of Economic Statistics*, Vol. II Supplement (July 1920), 1-55, and Rendigs Fels, *American Business Cycles 1865-1897* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1965), especially chapter 6 "The Cycles of 1865-79," 83-112.
40. 23 Nov. 1867.
41. *Eastern Chronicle*, 10 Mar. 1869.
42. 17 Feb. 1869.
43. For an analysis of the economy before 1854, see my earlier article "A Little Province Like This': The Economy of Nova Scotia Under Stress, 1812-1853" *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, Vol. VI (1988), 192-225.
44. For an account of British Nova Scotia's early economic development, see Lewis R. Fischer, "Revolution without Independence: The Canadian Colonies, 1749-1775" in *The Economy*

- of *Early America. The Revolutionary Period 1763–1790*, edited by Ronald Hoffman, et al. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1988), 88–125.
45. Roderick Floud, "Britain 1860–1914: A Survey" in *The Economic History of Britain Since 1700. Vol. 2, 1860 to the 1970s*, edited by Roderick Floud and Donald McCloskey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), 5.
  46. See Alice Hanson Jones, "Estimating Wealth of the Living from a Probate Sample" *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. XIII (Autumn 1982), 273–300; and Fazley Siddiq, "The Size Distribution of Probate Wealthholdings in Nova Scotia in the Late 19th Century" *Acadiensis*, Vol. 18 (Autumn 1988), 136–147, and his "Nineteenth-Century Wealth Transfers in Nova Scotia: The Administration of Probate" *Nova Scotia Historical Review*, Vol. 9 (December 1989), 35–48.
  47. Sample size was 481 for 1850–52 and 376 for 1871. The collection of the 1850–52 and part of the 1871 data was made possible by a 1989 SSHRCC grant (410–89–0970). Research assistance was provided by Phyllis Wagg, MA, Paul Carver, BA, with Ron Skibbens, MPA acting as computer consultant. For the research grant and the research assistance I am deeply grateful. I am indebted also to Dr. Siddiq for his valuable advice and encouragement.
  48. Collection of price data for Nova Scotia began in part with an SSHRCC Leave Fellowship (451–82–0326). It was aided by a Government of Canada COSEP grant, arranged in the summer of 1983 through the mediator of Dr. Peter Rider, Ph.D. of the Historical Division of the National Museum of Civilization, for which I am very grateful. Other SSHRCC grants (410–83–0420, 410–84–0508, 410–88–0239) also enabled me to hire research assistants. These included Jeannie Peterson, BA, Christopher Connolly, BA, Catherine MacKenzie, BA, BCL, Lois Loewen, BA, Thomas Henderson, BA, Debbie LeBel, BA, and Susan Hagborg, BA, for whose patience and devotion I am very thankful.
  49. I am very grateful to the staff at this marvellous institution for their constant attention, helpful suggestions and good humour. In particular I wish to thank Barry Cahill, MA, for his intelligent help over several years. I wish also to acknowledge the initial help of Dr. Brian Cuthbertson, Ph.D., now no longer with the PANS.
  50. The newspapers were very ready to report gold stories, and clearly added to the fever. For gold production figures see *Journals and Proceedings*, for 1876, Appx. 6, 79. From the moment that gold had first been discovered the Assembly had evinced considerable interest in the matter, peripheral as gold was to the economy of Nova Scotia. Detailed annual reports were printed with great regularity in the *Journals and Proceedings* of the House. Contrast this attention with the neglect with which important sectors of the economy, such as the fisheries, were greeted by the Assembly members. The *New York Mining Journal* in 1870 described the gold yield of Nova Scotia as "insignificant." See A. A. Jackson, 1 May 1870, US Consular report, Vol. 12 (1870–71) PANS. See as well the report of Henry S. Poole in Feb. 1875, *Journals and Proceedings* for 1875, Appx. 4, 29–30.
  51. 15 Nov. 1859.
  52. Rosemarie Langhout, "Alternative Opportunities: The Development of Shipping at Sydney Harbour, 1842–1889" in *Cape Breton at 200*, edited by Kenneth Donovan (Sydney: College of Cape Breton Press, 1985), 53–69. Paul Tousevard, "Growth and Decline of Arichat, 1765–1880" (M.A. Thesis, Dalhousie University, Dept. of Economics, 1984).
  53. Rusty Bitterman, "Middle River: The Social Structure of Agriculture in a Nineteenth-Century Cape Breton Community" (MA Thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1987). He believes that Cape Breton agriculture, however poor and backward, was annually between 1850 and 1880 worth more than the combined value of fishing, shipping and coal. See 30 fn 2.
  54. Stephen J. Hornsby, "An Historical Geography of Cape Breton Island in the Nineteenth Century" (Ph.D. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1986), 173. See also his "Migration and Settlement: The Scots of Cape Breton" in *Geographical Perspectives*, 15–24.
  55. Alan R. MacNeil, "Cultural Stereotypes and Highland Farming in Eastern Nova Scotia, 1827–1861" *Histoire sociale–Social History*, Vol. XIX (May 1986), 39–56; MacKinnon and Wynn, *Geographical Perspectives*.

56. Stephen Maynard, "On the Market's Edge: Family, the Productive Household and the Capitalist Formation of the Maritime Countryside, Hopewell, Nova Scotia, 1870-1890" (MA Thesis, Queen's University, 1987).
57. This point was made when Sydney was considered. See Hornsby, "An Historical Geography," 173.
58. The point is made by Ben Forster, *A Conjunction of Interests. Business, Politics and Tariffs 1825-1879* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 9.
59. See a report of the US Consul in Halifax, 31 Jan. 1854, US Consular Reports, Vol. 7 (1854-56) PANS. In 1878 the US Consul at Windsor reported that most of the ships built there were "entirely of spruce, consequently cannot compare favourably with ships built of oak and hard pine." 30 Nov. 1878, US Consular reports, Vol. 27 (1872-86) PANS.
60. Eric W. Sager, *Seafaring Labour: The Merchant Marine of Atlantic Canada 1820-1914* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989). See especially Graph 10: "Tramp Shipping Rates and Selected North American Sailing Ship Freights, 1855-99," to which the late Keith Matthews made an important contribution.
61. Nova Scotia Assembly. *Journals and Proceedings*, for 1864, Appx. 35, 41-2.
62. *Ibid.* for 1854, Appx. 77, 486-87; for 1855, Appx. 86, 380-81; for 1856, Appx. 86, 388-89; for 1857, Appx. 60, 370-71; for 1858, Appx. 14, 308-09. This point has also been made by Eric W. Sager and Gerry Panting, "Staple Economies and the Rise and Decline of the Shipping Industry in Atlantic Canada, 1820-1914," in *Change and Adaptation in Maritime History. The North Atlantic Fleets in the Nineteenth Century* edited by Lewis R. Fisher & Gerald E. Panting (St. John's: Maritime History Group, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1985), 17.
63. David Alexander and Gerry Panting, "The Mercantile Fleet and Its Owners: Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, 1840-1889" *Acadiensis*, Vol. 7 (Spring 1978), 3-28.
64. Lewis R. Fischer, "The Shipping Industry and Regional Economic Development in Atlantic Canada" (unpublished paper read to the annual meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, Halifax, June 1981.) See as well Sager & Panting, "Staple Economies . . ." *Change and Adaptation*, 27-8.
65. For a study of the importance of public finances to the British colonies in North America in the Eighteenth Century, see Julian Gwyn, "Financial Revolution in Massachusetts: Public Credit and Taxation, 1692-1774" *Histoire sociale-Social History*, XVII (May 1984): 59-77, and "The Impact of British Military Spending on the Colonial American Money Markets, 1760-1783" *Historical Papers* (1980), 77-99.
66. Details are found in the annual statements of provincial revenue and expenditure in successive reports of the Nova Scotia Assembly's *Journals and Proceedings*.
67. The most detailed analysis is Rosemarie Langhout, "Developing Nova Scotia: Railways and Public Accounts, 1848-1867" *Acadiensis*, Vol. 14 (Spring 1985), 3-28. She calls the government's decision to build and operate the railway "one of the first large scale efforts at state capitalism on the North American continent," 5.
68. *Ibid.*, 24.
69. The term "good soil" means, by ARDA's soil classification system, Class 1 and 2. Of Nova Scotia's 13.1 million acres, only 46,900 (0.4%) fits Class 1 specifications, and 363,100 (2.8%) Class 2. In 1970 only 41% of this Class 2 land was cleared. Class 3 soils, those with severe limitations for agriculture, amount to another 1,870,000 acres (14.3%), of which, in 1970 only 21% was cleared. The remaining 82.5% of the province was virtually useless for agriculture. See John D. Hilchey, *The Canada Land Survey*, Report No. 8: *Soil Capability Analysis for Agriculture in Nova Scotia* (Ottawa: Department of Regional Economic Expansion, 1970).
70. Figure 1. "Improved Land per Family 1851" in MacKinnon and Wynn, *Geographical Perspectives*, 52. My view of Nova Scotia's agriculture, following contemporary opinion, is not as enthusiastic as theirs appears to be.
71. Nova Scotia Assembly. *Journals and Proceedings*, for 1867. Appx. 7, 14.
72. *Ibid.*, Appx. 7, 16.

73. Patricia A. Thornton, "The Problems of Out-Migration from Atlantic Canada, 1871-1921" *Acadiensis*, Vol. 15 (Autumn 1985), 3-34; Alan A. Brookes, "The Golden Age and the Exodus from King's County" *Acadiensis*, Vol. 11 (Autumn 1981), 57-82, his "Out-migration from the Maritime Provinces 1860-1900. Some Preliminary Considerations" *Acadiensis*, Vol. 6 (Spring 1976), 26-55, and his "The Exodus: Migration from the Maritime Provinces to Boston during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century" (Ph.D. thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1978). See as well, Neil J. MacKinnon, "Nova Scotia from Reciprocity to Confederation. A Social Study of the Period" (MA Thesis, Dalhousie University, 1963).
74. *Liverpool Transcript*, 7 June 1854. This is but one example among many from a variety of newspapers and other printed sources.
75. 15 Aug. 1859.
76. 1 May 1865.
77. *Nova Scotia. In Its Historical, Mercantile and Industrial Relations* (Montreal, 1873), 499. See as well Thomas Freder Knight, *Shore and Deep Sea Fisheries of Nova Scotia* (Halifax, 1867). For an estimate of the relative importance of the fishery to Nova Scotia between 1812 and 1853 see my "A Little Province like This: The Economy of Nova Scotia Under Stress, 1812-1853" *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, Vol. VI (1988), 209-16.
78. 29 May 1858.
79. 31 March 1858.
80. *Acadian Recorder*, 5 June 1858.
81. *Cape Breton News*, 6 Oct. 1852.
82. The best study of this subject is David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).
83. J.R. Ward, *Poverty and Progress in the Caribbean 1800-1960* (London: Macmillan, 1985), 8, 27, 34-5.
84. This point was first made by David Alexander, *The Decay of Trade. An Economic History of the Newfoundland Saltfish Trade, 1935-1965* (St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1977), cited by Shannon Ryan, *Fish Out of Water. The Newfoundland Saltfish Trade 1814-1914* (St. John's: Breakwater Press, 1986), xx-xxi.
85. Nova Scotia Assembly. *Journals and Proceedings*, for 1860-1867, and thereafter the annual trade data for Nova Scotia in Canada. *Sessional Papers*.
86. Reprinted in the *Yarmouth Herald*, 3 April 1852. Recent work on the fisheries is by Bertram E. Balcom, "Production and Marketing in Nova Scotia's Dried Fish Trade, 1850-1914" (MA Thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1981) and his *History of the Lunenburg Fishing Industry* (Lunenburg: Lunenburg Fisheries Museum, 1977); and B. Carman Bickerton, *A History of the Canadian Fisheries in the Georges Bank Area*, Vol. II of *Annexes to the Counter-Memorial Submitted by Canada* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1983), which deals with the fishery from the 1880s.
87. Nova Scotia Assembly, *Journals and Proceedings*, for 1866, Appx. 2: "Supplementary Trade Returns," 1-16.
88. To US Secretary of State Davis, 23 Jan. 1871, US Consular Reports, Vol. 12 (1870-71).
89. *Journals and Proceedings*, for 1868, Appx. 22, 1-2.
90. *Queen's Quarterly*, Vol. 76 (Spring 1969), 58.
91. Sager, *Seafaring Labour*, 217.
92. Information from Professor Ian Mackay, Dept. of History, Queen's University.
93. 24 Sept. 1856.
94. 14 Aug. 1856.
95. Information from Terry Punch, MA, in a paper read to the Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society, 11 Dec. 1989.