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# ARTICLES

## From *Haute Cuisine* to Ox Roasts: Public Feasting and the Negotiation of Class in Mid-19th-Century Saint John and Halifax

Bonnie Huskins

We ought to have had our guns charged — Ay, and our glasses too, in readiness — so that the moment of the joyful event should reach the city — we would have nothing to do but ‘let go and haul.’

(Saint John *Morning News* 3 April 1840)

### *Introduction*

ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR and universal forms of celebration is feasting and drinking. Despite its popularity and universality, the public feast has not received sufficient scholarly attention from historians. Most of the historical studies on feasting focus on the role of the feast in medieval or early modern Europe.<sup>1</sup> The

<sup>1</sup>Bridget Ann Henisch, *Fast and Feast Food in Medieval Society* (University Park and London 1976). Feasting and drinking were some of the primary functions of festivals in the early modern period (*Carnaval* in Southern Europe and autumn feast days in Britain), Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London 1978), 178, 183, 186, 193, 195, 196. “Sustenance” as well as “sociability” were important components of public celebrations in 18th-century America, Barbara Karsky, “Sustenance and sociability: eating habits in eighteenth-century America,” *Annales*, 40 (September-October 1985), 51-2. By the time of King George III’s jubilee in 1809, the British expected a “free meal” during celebrations. See Linda Colley, “The Apotheosis of George III: Loyalty, Royalty, and the British Nation, 1760-1820,” *Past and Present*, 102 (February 1984), 119.

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literature on the Victorian era tends to chronicle changing manners and eating habits in a rather antiquarian fashion.<sup>2</sup> An exception is Harvey Levenstein's *Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet*, which examines "why and how [people in the 19th and early 20th centuries] change or do not change their food habits."<sup>3</sup> In the Canadian historiography, much of the recent literature centres on drink and responses to drinking, in the form of the temperance and prohibition movements.<sup>4</sup> While the experience of drinking in the Victorian era is currently being dissected by scholars such as Judith Fingard, who graphically portrays the consequences of alcoholism on recidivists in *The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax*, James Sturgis, who describes the Rennie family's battle with alcohol in 19th-century Canada, and Cheryl Krasnick Warsh, who examines the "drinking woman" at the turn of the century,<sup>5</sup> more emphasis needs to be placed on "what lay behind ... the fervid advocacy of temperance" and moral reform.<sup>6</sup> We also need more analyses of the experience of eating (as well as drinking) in 19th-century Canada. Thus, the primary objective of this paper is to delineate a typology or hierarchy of public feasts in mid 19th-century Saint John and Halifax, which will provide us with an alternate lens through which to view class and culture.

<sup>2</sup>Sarah Freeman, *Mutton and Oysters. The Victorians and their Food* (London 1989); Jean Latham, *The Pleasure of Your Company. A History of Manners and Meals* (London 1972); Gerard Brett, *Dinner is Served: A History of Dining in England, 1400-1900* (London 1968).

<sup>3</sup>Harvey A. Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table. The Transformation of the American Diet* (New York 1988). For the subsequent volume, see Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty. A Social History of Eating in Modern America* (New York 1993).

<sup>4</sup>For a by no means complete list of studies on the 19th-century temperance movement, see: Ernest J. Dick, "From Temperance to Prohibition in 19th Century Nova Scotia," *Dalhousie Review*, 61 (Autumn 1981), 530-52; J.K. Chapman, "The-Mid-Nineteenth-Century Temperance Movements in New Brunswick and Maine," *Canadian Historical Review*, 35 (1954), 43-60; T.W. Acheson, *Saint John. The Making of a Colonial Urban Community* (Toronto 1985), ch. 7; Gail G. Campbell, "Disfranchised but not Quiescent: Women Petitioners in New Brunswick in the mid-19th Century," *Acadiensis*, 18 (Spring 1989), 22-54; Gary Hartlen, "'From a Torrent to a Trickle': A Case Study of Rum Imports and the Temperance Movement in Liverpool, Nova Scotia," in James H. Morrison and James Moreira, eds., *Tempered by Rum. Rum in the History of the Maritime Provinces* (Porters Lake 1988), 62-75; Cheryl Krasnick Warsh, "'John Barleycorn Must Die': An Introduction to the Social History of Alcohol," in Cheryl Krasnick Warsh, ed., *Drink in Canada* (Montréal 1993), 3-26; Jan Noel, "Dry Patriotism: The Chiniquy Crusade," in Warsh, *Drink in Canada*, 27-42; Glenn J. Lockwood, "Temperance in Upper Canada as Ethnic Subterfuge," in Warsh, *Drink in Canada*, 43-69; Jacques Paul Couturier, "Prohibition or Regulation? The Enforcement of the Canada Temperance Act in Moncton, 1881-1896," in Warsh, *Drink in Canada*, 144-65.

<sup>5</sup>James L. Sturgis, "'The spectre of a drunkard's grave': One Family's Battle With Alcohol in Late Nineteenth-Century Canada," in Warsh, *Drink in Canada*, 115-43; Cheryl Krasnick Warsh, "'Oh, Lord, pour a cordial in her wounded heart': The Drinking Woman in Victorian and Edwardian Canada," in Warsh, *Drink in Canada*, 70-91.

<sup>6</sup>Sturgis, "'The spectre of a drunkard's grave,'" 115.

Joseph Gusfield has commented that “what is eaten and how it is eaten constitute a mode of communication and can be read as a cultural object, embodying the attributes of social organization or general culture.”<sup>7</sup> In the popular bestseller, *Much Depends on Dinner*, Margaret Visser similarly notes: “Food — what is chosen from the possibilities available, how it is presented, how it is eaten, with whom and when, and how much time is allotted to cooking and eating it — is one of the means by which a society creates itself and acts out its aims and fantasies.”<sup>8</sup> While an analysis of feasting and drinking can provide many insights into the nature of society, this paper will focus on how we can use food and drink as markers of class and as instruments in the process of class formation. This emphasis on food, drink, and social relations is borrowed from structuralists like anthropologist Mary Douglas and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who argue that “food categories encode social events, as ... they express hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries, and transactions across boundaries.”<sup>9</sup> Mary Douglas has noted that “... we need to stop thinking of food as something that people desire and use apart from social relations ... It is disingenuous to pretend that food is not one of the media of social exclusion.”<sup>10</sup> Did feasting and drinking in mid 19th-century Saint John and Halifax help to define the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, as suggested by these social scientists?

In order to answer this question, it will be necessary to explore the various meanings and uses of public feasts. Why did people in different classes partake of “victuals” and “spirits”? How does this reflect their different priorities and social practises at mid century? Mary Douglas argues that “... the ordinary consuming public in modern industrial society works hard to invest its food with moral, social, and aesthetic meanings.” If we do not seek out these meanings, “festivities [will be] treated as illegitimate demands on the world’s productive system, the source of social inequalities and ultimately responsible for the maldistribution of food,” clearly an incomplete and misleading understanding of such events.<sup>11</sup> In this paper I will systematically explore the meanings of the public feast for the middle-class and working-class inhabitants of mid-Victorian Saint John and Halifax. Emphasis will be placed on public secular feasts — that is, the banquet, ox roast, institutional repast, and tea and coffee soirée — which were held to commemorate royal and

<sup>7</sup>Joseph Gusfield, “Passage to play: rituals of drinking time in American society,” in Mary Douglas, ed., *Constructive Drinking: Perspectives on Drink from Anthropology* (Cambridge 1987), 76. This comment is an explanation of the structuralist perspective.

<sup>8</sup>Margaret Visser, *Much Depends on Dinner* (Toronto 1986), 12.

<sup>9</sup>Stephen Mennell, *All Manners of Food* (Oxford 1985), 11. Mennell is discussing the contributions of the structuralists; Mary Douglas, “A distinctive anthropological perspective,” in Douglas, *Constructive Drinking*, 8.

<sup>10</sup>Mary Douglas, “Standard Social Uses of Food: Introduction,” in Mary Douglas, ed., *Food in the Social Order. Studies of Food and Festivities in Three American Communities* (New York 1984), 36.

<sup>11</sup>Douglas, “Standard Social Uses of Food,” 5-6.

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patriotic anniversaries. The most notable celebrations in this analysis include the observance of Queen Victoria's coronation in 1838 and her marriage in 1840, the birth of the Prince of Wales in 1841, and the celebration of his visit in 1860 and his marriage in 1863. This is by no means meant to be a comprehensive analysis of feasts or celebrations. The focus here is on public secular feasting — I will not be dealing with religious feasting or the private dinner. It is only through these local micro-studies that we can effectively “get at” the meanings associated with food and drink. As Mary Douglas notes: “The meanings of food need to be studied in small-scale exemplars.”<sup>12</sup>

### *Context*

SAINT JOHN AND HALIFAX were both commercial entrepôts in the 19th century. Saint John processed timber from its hinterland — the Saint John River Valley — and competed in an international timber trade and ship-building industry.<sup>13</sup> Halifax relied on a salt fish trade, particularly with the West Indies, and a general import trade.

By mid-century, urbanization had created rather complex urban landscapes in Saint John and Halifax. Initially the ward had been the basis of civic government, with the alderman functioning as a *paterfamilias*, creating an intricate network of relationships operating on the foundation of blood, service, and patronage. By mid century, however, ward politics was being supplanted by a professionalized civic administration, which was “more comprehensive, less personal, better organized, less arbitrary but more capable of imposing its will on a broader front.”<sup>14</sup>

Increasing class differentiation also accompanied the growth of these urban centres. Irish Roman Catholic immigrants swelled the ranks of the working class in the 1840s. Poverty was further accentuated by the susceptibility of the colonial economy to the vagaries of external and internal trends and erratic business depressions.<sup>15</sup> Many “respectable” middle-class citizens distanced themselves as much as possible from the working-class poor in order to avoid the social problems associated with poverty, such as the outbreaks of cholera which infested the cities at mid century.<sup>16</sup> This desire for social distance is most effectively illustrated by the residential make up of the two cities. In Halifax, suburbanization of the rural Northwest Arm began when middle-class businessmen, politicians, and lawyers

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>13</sup>Acheson, *Saint John*, ch. 1; Graeme Wynn, *Timber Colony. A historical geography of early nineteenth-century New Brunswick* (Toronto 1981).

<sup>14</sup>Acheson, *Saint John*, 195.

<sup>15</sup>Judith Fingard, “The Relief of the Unemployed Poor in Saint John, Halifax, and St. John’s, 1815-1860,” *Acadiensis* 5 (Autumn 1975), 33; James M. Whalen, “Social Welfare in New Brunswick, 1784-1900,” *Acadiensis*, 2 (Autumn 1972), 60.

<sup>16</sup>Geoffrey Bilson, “The Cholera Epidemic in St. John, New Brunswick, 1854,” *Acadiensis*, 4 (Autumn 1974), 85-99.

moved there and built lavish estates in the 1840s and 1850s. By the 1860s, the south end of the city had become known as the “court end of town,” because of the existence of the residences of major merchants and government officials. A black community called Africville established itself by 1850 on the shores of the Bedford Basin and the Harbour, and the presence of the railway in the north end of the city encouraged the creation of a working-class community called Richmond. Halifax’s major British garrison and naval station also reinforced residential segregation as a sailortown emerged along the waterfront and a soldiertown around the base of Citadel Hill.<sup>17</sup> In Saint John, the southernmost ward of Sydney was comprised largely of working-class inhabitants who provided services for the resident garrison. The adjacent Dukes ward boasted a mixed neighbourhood of “artisans, merchants, and mechanics.” Queens ward, a little further north, housed the largest proportion of merchants and other “businesspeople.” A “Protestant” artisanal population resided in the eastern part of Kings ward, and an Irish Roman-Catholic neighbourhood in the western end, called York Point. By the early 19th century, African-New Brunswick residents had settled in a segregated community in the vicinity of Loch Lomand.<sup>18</sup>

The garrisons in both cities reinforced the distinction between “rough” and “respectable” in more ways than one. Rank and file soldiers supported networks of taverns, brothels, and similar industries, while the officers entered the ranks of the local elite. This effect was particularly magnified in Halifax due to the larger size of the garrison. Regular soldiers, numbering between 2,000-4,000, comprised close to 25 per cent of the resident male population of Halifax in the 19th century.<sup>19</sup>

What role did drinking and feasting play in the creation and dramatization of class distinctions in mid-Victorian Saint John and Halifax? All classes dined and imbibed at mid century; it was a “heavy-eating, hard-drinking age.”<sup>20</sup> Residents could choose from a wide variety of taverns and saloons. In 1830, Saint John issued 206 tavern licenses and 29 retail licenses, which meant that 1 citizen in 50 held a liquor seller’s license. Halifax contained between 200-300 drinking houses and shops by the 1860s, approximately 1 drinking establishment for every 100 inhabi-

<sup>17</sup>Description based on Janet Guildford, “Halifax, 1850-1870,” unpublished paper, 18-23; Susan Buggy, “Building Halifax, 1841-1871,” *Acadiensis*, 10 (Autumn 1980), 90-112. For discussions of sailortown and soldiertown, see Judith Fingard, *The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax* (Porters Lake 1989) and Fingard, *Jack in Port. Sailortowns of Eastern Canada* (Toronto 1982).

<sup>18</sup>Scott W. See, *Riots in New Brunswick: Orange Nativism and Social Violence in the 1840s* (Toronto 1993), 26-27; Acheson, *Saint John*, ch. 1.

<sup>19</sup>Fingard, *The Dark Side of Life*, 15; Judith Fingard, “Beyond the Halifax Barracks: the Social Context of Late Victorian Army Life,” the MacNutt Memorial Lecture, University of New Brunswick, 1983-84, 3.

<sup>20</sup>J. Murray Beck, “James Boyle Uniacke,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, VIII, 903.

tants, including women and children.<sup>21</sup> Many working-class recreations “centred on the tavern,” and liquor had also become an “integral part of the work culture.” Respectable men and women largely confined their drinking to the home or to more exclusive venues. Eliza Donkin, a young Victorian woman from Saint John, noted the “habitual use of liquor in the family circles.”<sup>22</sup> National societies often celebrated their anniversaries with annual banquets.<sup>23</sup> Celebrants also dined in observance of certain *rites de passage*, Christmas, and other high days and holy days, as well as during commemorative celebrations. Although all classes drank and feasted, did they do so in the same way and for the same purpose? Indeed, it is the argument of this paper that different forms of feasting reflected and reinforced contemporary class divisions. Middle-class and elite residents, for example, drew their social circles tighter by partaking of exclusive indoor banquets.

### *Banquet*

THE BANQUET, a frequent accompaniment to the grand ball, was one of the most long standing and popular elite entertainments. Judith Fingard mentions the ball (and banquet) as one of the leisure activities which united the “well-to-do” in the winter months in pre-industrial Canada.<sup>24</sup> Private citizens, provincial and civic officials, and voluntary organizations usually orchestrated the entertainments. Saint John’s common council hosted a “corporation dinner” in honour of Queen Victoria’s coronation in 1838.<sup>25</sup> Two years later, the lieutenant governor of Nova Scotia marked Queen Victoria’s marriage by holding a ball and banquet, as did members of the North British Society, Highland Society, and the St. George’s Society.<sup>26</sup> In Saint John, similar entertainments were given by the “Victoria Club,” a volunteer company, and the Freemasons.<sup>27</sup> A committee of private citizens and

<sup>21</sup>Acheson, *Saint John*, 140; Judith Fingard, “‘A Great Big Rum Shop’: The Drink Trade in Victorian Halifax,” in Morrison and Moreira, *Tempered by Rum*, 90.

<sup>22</sup>Acheson, *Saint John*, 142; Reminiscences of Eliza Donkin, collected and compiled by Morley, Scott, 33, New Brunswick Museum (NBM).

<sup>23</sup>I. Allen Jack, *History of St. Andrew’s Society of St. John New Brunswick, 1798-1903* (Saint John 1903); D.C. Harvey, “N.S. Philanthropic Society,” *Dalhousie Review*, 19 (October 1939), 287-95; Robert P. Harvey, “Black Beans, Banners and Banquets: The Charitable Irish Society of Halifax at Two Hundred,” *Nova Scotia Historical Review*, 6 (1986), 16-35.

<sup>24</sup>Judith Fingard, “The Poor in Winter: Seasonality and Society in Pre-Industrial Canada,” in Michael S. Cross and Gregory S. Kealey, eds., *Pre-Industrial Canada, 1760-1849* (Toronto 1985), 63-4.

<sup>25</sup>D., “Corporation Dinner, alias Humbug!” in *Saint John Weekly Chronicle*, 22 June 1838, also 29 June 1838.

<sup>26</sup>Halifax *Acadian Recorder*, 11 April 1840; *Halifax Times*, 14 April 1840.

<sup>27</sup>“An Infant,” *Saint John Commercial News and General Advertiser*, 27 March 1840 (shortly after renamed *Morning News*); *Saint John Morning News*, 29 May 1840; *New Brunswick Courier*, 28 March 1840, 4 April 1840, 30 May 1840.



government officials organized the dinner and dance held in honour of the visit of the Prince of Wales to Halifax in 1860.

Balls and banquets promoted exclusivity by restricting attendance to a clique of local, provincial, imperial, and military dignitaries, and by charging a relatively high subscription or admission price for everyone else. A perusal of the guest list for Saint John's "corporation" banquet in 1838 shows that it mainly consisted of civic and provincial officials, military and militia officers, and commercial and mercantile elites (see figure 1). One local correspondent complained:

a dinner to fifty persons, including the corporate body is not in form or intent a public festival, but merely a private concern apparently to answer some party, and to gratify a few persons at the expense of the public.<sup>28</sup>

"A Bluenose" requested that the idea of an exclusive ball and banquet be abandoned for Halifax's coronation celebration, and that the day be

spent in a manner in which all could enjoy themselves; — the halls of our Provincial Building have been desecrated enough already. This cannot be the case with a public ball [and banquet], which, make it as public as you please, will not be attended by the generality of the community. It would be more highly prized, (as I doubt not they will also think), if His Excellency, the Army, the Navy, and those in high rank among our civilians, would for this occasion, unbend as much of their exclusiveness as would be proper, and encourage and patronise such amusements as all without exception, high and low, rich and poor, may participate in with exultant satisfaction.<sup>29</sup>

Organizers of the ball and banquet held for the Prince of Wales in Halifax in 1860 restricted admission to 250 invitations and 1000 tickets, priced at a restrictive two sovereigns for a man and one sovereign for a woman. According to the *Evening Express*, these prices kept the attraction "a rather more aristocratic affair than it otherwise would have been."<sup>30</sup>

Such events provided an opportunity for the display of respectability, breeding, and refinement. Thorstein Veblen has remarked that "conspicuous consumption" is *prima facie* evidence of one's "pecuniary success" and "social worth."<sup>31</sup> "A Bluenose" described the typical ball and banquet as an event at which

<sup>28</sup>"Corporation Dinner, alias Humbug!" Saint John *Weekly Chronicle*, 22 June 1838. An old man in Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, (London 1962), 39, describes a similar corporation dinner: "'tis a great public dinner of the gentle-people and such like leading volk — wi' the Mayor in the chair. As we plainer fellows bain't invited, they leave the winder-shutters open that we may get jist a sense o't out here."

<sup>29</sup>"A Bluenose," Halifax *Times*, 22 May 1838.

<sup>30</sup>Meeting of the Acting Committee, 21 June 1860, in Minutes of the Meetings of the Committee for the Reception of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, 1860, MG1, 312A, Public Archives of Nova Scotia (PANS); Halifax *Evening Express*, 3 August 1860.

<sup>31</sup>Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York 1934), 127.



Tom, Dick, and Harry, tag, rag, and bobtail, might have an opportunity of displaying their breeding before the wives and daughters of the big wigs; and the wives and daughters of the little wigs an opportunity of being laughed at by Tom, Dick, and Harry, by Lord Somebody, and the honble [sic]. Mr. Nobody, or the red-coat and blue-coat schools. No such thing Mr. Editor — by the powers! — this is not the way the Coronation of Her Majesty should be observed in any of her dominions — at home or beyond the seas.<sup>32</sup>

The dinners served at these events were notable for the “strict rules” governing the “presentation of food, the varieties permitted at a given occasion, and rules of precedence and combination.”<sup>33</sup> The menu for the Prince of Wales’ marriage feast at the Halifax Hotel in 1863 (see figure 2) is an example of 19th-century *haute cuisine*. Many of the dishes featured in the bill of fare are French in origin. Indeed, culinary respectability has been associated with French (and Italian) cooking since the exchange of cooks and recipes among the “courtly strata” in the Middle Ages.<sup>34</sup> However, the 19th century witnessed the “full establishment of a French international culinary hegemony,” not only in Europe, but in North America as well, as the great French chefs fled from their aristocratic employers after the Revolution, and set up their own restaurants, and wrote cooking manuals, which disseminated their culinary arts.<sup>35</sup> Most of these French dishes were rather “fussy” items, noted for their sauces. Some of the simpler English dishes did survive the French culinary onslaught, particularly the basic meat items. The caterer of the Halifax banquet undoubtedly consulted one of the cooking manuals written by these French chefs, for many chefs like Alexis Soyer specialized in organizing and catering grand banquets, like the one in Halifax.<sup>36</sup>

The courses served at the Prince of Wales’ marriage feast resemble those associated with “service à la française.” “Service à la française” was a tradition of serving dinner dating back to the Middle Ages, and was characterized by three set courses and dessert. Soup and/or fish comprised the first course. The second course consisted of the meat dishes, divided into “entrées” (fancy side dishes, usually of French origin) and “relevés” (larger and plainer items, usually English in origin). The third course was usually game and/or shellfish, followed by dessert (sometimes divided between “relevés” and “entremets”). Proponents of “service à la française,” as evident in this menu, also offered a number of options in each course, and served them all simultaneously, like a modern buffet.<sup>37</sup>

In the 1860s, “service à la russe” made its appearance in England and France, although it was not universally followed until the 1870s-1890s. The main difference between “service à la française” and “service à la russe” was that, in the latter,

<sup>32</sup>“A Bluenose,” *Halifax Times*, 22 May 1838.

<sup>33</sup>Douglas, “Standard Social Uses of Food,” 15.

<sup>34</sup>Mennell, *All Manners of Food*, 60, 102.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 135, 136.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 102, 147, 150-1.

<sup>37</sup>Freeman, *Mutton and Oysters*, 184-91; Mennell, *All Manners of Food*, 79, 150.

the servants carved and portioned the meal, and served the dishes in pairs or sets of alternatives. Dishes were passed around and not laid on the table; also, menus were distributed.<sup>38</sup> This gave the hosts more time to entertain their guests and “drew attention to the quality and sophistication of individual dishes.”<sup>39</sup> The Prince of Wales’ marriage feast in Halifax reflects “service à la russe” in that menus were evidently printed, and courses listed as sets of alternatives in the bill of fare. However, it is not known whether or not the dishes were served this way by the servants; also, the courses themselves still reflect “service à la française.” Regardless, Haligonians evidently found it important to structure their banquets according to typical middle-class rules of etiquette. This structure undoubtedly helped to define the banquet as “one of the weapons in the social armory” of respectability and exclusivity.<sup>40</sup>

The nature of the wines served at such events also expressed class identity. Mary Douglas reminds us: “We must take note of the exclusionary potential represented by the serried ranks of vintage and lesser wines ....”<sup>41</sup> For the banquet held in Halifax in 1860 in celebration of the visit of the Prince of Wales, the organizing committee selected 12 dozen sherries, 31 dozen high quality champagnes, including 23 dozen of “Mumm’s,” and 28 dozen of the cheaper wines.<sup>42</sup>

Banquets also reinforced middle-class masculinity. Although the ball was one of the only celebratory activities in the mid-Victorian period in which middle-class women could actively participate,<sup>43</sup> they usually retired from the banquet table before the toasts began because public drinking was primarily a male ritual. The men often raised their glasses in honour of the women, but such “accolades” were only “minor and perfunctory exercises.”<sup>44</sup> According to Levenstein, women were also expected to show greater “gastronomic restraint.”<sup>45</sup>

<sup>38</sup>Mennell, *All Manners of Food*, 150; Freeman, *Mutton and Oysters*, 184-91.

<sup>39</sup>Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table*, 16.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, *Revolution at the Table*, 14.

<sup>41</sup>Douglas, “A distinctive and anthropological perspective,” 9.

<sup>42</sup>Meeting of the Acting Committee, 10 July 1860, in Minutes of the Meetings of the Committee for the Reception of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, 1860, MG1, 312A, PANS.

<sup>43</sup>Halifax *Morning Sun*, 27 July 1860.

<sup>44</sup>Halifax *Sun*, 11 June 1845; Halifax *Novascotian*, 20 August 1860. In San Francisco in 1855, women were invited to observe the elaborate preparations for a banquet, but were then expected to leave “demurely.” See, Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore 1990), 18; men raising their glasses, see Ryan, *Women in Public*, 135. In court circles, Queen Victoria tried to avert excessive drunkenness by insisting that gentlemen not be left on their own for too long, see Alan Delago, *Victorian Entertainments* (London 1971), 12. Cheryl Krasnick Warsh notes that the drinking woman in Victorian Canada was viewed as a form of “bastardized masculinity,” see Warsh, ““Oh lord, pour a cordial in her wounded heart’,” 89.

<sup>45</sup>Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table*, 12.

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The list of toasts at such affairs acknowledged the hierarchy of colonial society. Royal occasions particularly paid tribute to the lieutenant governor, as the Queen's representative. At Saint John's corporation dinner in 1838, those present acknowledged Lieutenant-Governor Sir John Harvey and his actions in the recent border war with the United States.<sup>46</sup> Toasts were also customarily extended to Queen Victoria and the royal family, the colonial secretary, the governor general, the British officers and the army and navy, the provincial administration, the sister colonies, the lieutenant governor's wife and the "fair daughters" of the colonies, and other special guests.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, the balls and banquets held during public celebrations in the early-to-mid 19th century promoted exclusivity and respectability by restricting attendance, encouraging displays of opulence and finery, serving *haute cuisine* and fine wines, and toasting and thereby reinforcing the *status quo*, including the inequalities of class and gender.

### *Ox Roast*

CELEBRATORY REGALEMENT was not confined to the middle and upper classes. The general public also partook of "great outdoor feasts where massive quantities of meat, game, and liquor were consumed."<sup>48</sup> The Nova Scotia Philanthropic Society inaugurated the custom of having an annual picnic to celebrate the founding of Halifax.<sup>49</sup> The first natal day picnic at the Prince's Lodge in 1839 consisted of an "abundance of viands and lots of good liquor to moisten them." Similarly, approximately 300 people enjoyed a feast of "fish, flesh, and fowl" during the 1845 picnic.<sup>50</sup>

Larger outdoor feasts were also held in the public squares and commons. It is significant that the feasts provided for the general public and the poor took place out of doors. One reason was pure logistics. Organizers did not have the facilities sufficient to accommodate large crowds. But the "out of doors" also conveyed images of democracy and freedom which suited the mass demonstration. In a letter to the editor of the *Morning Journal*, a Haligonian admitted that the "Codfish Aristocracy" had every right to hold a ball and banquet for the Prince's visit in 1860, and to set the admission so high that "plebeians" could not attend, but it was not so with outdoor demonstrations, which "ought to be every person's business,

<sup>46</sup>*New Brunswick Courier*, 30 June 1838.

<sup>47</sup>For a customary list of toasts, see *Halifax Times*, 3 July 1838, 28 April 1840.

<sup>48</sup>Karsky, "Sustenance and sociability," 61.

<sup>49</sup>Harvey, "N.S. Philanthropic Society," 292. The Charitable Irish Society had their first picnic in 1846, see Harvey, "Black Beans, Banners, and Banquets," 22-3.

<sup>50</sup>*Nova Scotian*, 12 June 1839; *Halifax Sun*, 6 and 11 June 1845.

and every person's privilege to share in."<sup>51</sup> The *Acadian Recorder* also described the out of doors as "the proper field for a full and unrestrained feast of enjoyment."<sup>52</sup>

In 18th and early 19th-century England, public outdoor feasts functioned as instruments of paternalism organized by the British gentry, well-to-do farmers, and members of the local government, on such occasions as the completion of the harvest, and historical and patriotic anniversaries.<sup>53</sup> In mid-Victorian New Brunswick, ruling merchants in single industry towns provided similar feasts, as in Chatham, where Joseph Cunard provided free food and drink for the working-class inhabitants dependent on his sawmills and mercantile enterprises.<sup>54</sup>

Providers of outdoor feasts in the more complex urban centres of Saint John and Halifax also wished to gratify the masses and ensure their own popularity. In Saint John, the onus for such meals lay primarily with the mayor, aldermen, and assistants who were primarily artisanal in makeup.<sup>55</sup> Most of the common council's appropriation for Queen Victoria's coronation and marriage festivities in 1838 and 1840 went toward the provision of outdoor feasts for the public. In 1838, the council allocated £332/16s/3d for the public "repast" (compared to only £115 for the corporation banquet and £7/10s for a supper in the city jail).<sup>56</sup> Of the £250 earmarked for the marriage celebration in 1840, £210 was expended on outdoor feasts, £30 for dinners in the charitable and penal institutions, and £10 for gun powder for the militia.<sup>57</sup> During the coronation festivities, two aldermen and assistant aldermen cut up and distributed the food in their constituency on the west side (Carleton), symbolizing the central role of the common council in providing "victuals."<sup>58</sup> Since Halifax was not incorporated until 1841, private citizens and provincial and imperial officials organized and financed the events in 1838 and 1840. In addition, the Nova Scotia Philanthropic Society sponsored outdoor feasts for the Mi'kmaq in 1840 and during the Halifax centenary in 1849. During its first

<sup>51</sup>"A Right Loyal Citizen," *Halifax Morning Journal*, 30 May 1860.

<sup>52</sup>*Halifax Acadian Recorder*, 18 April 1863.

<sup>53</sup>Robert W. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society, 1700-1850* (Cambridge 1973), 59-65; G.S. Metraux, "Of Feasts and Carnivals," *Cultures*, 3 (1976), 8. For a description of a harvest supper in rural England in the early 19th century, see Thomas Hardy, *Far From the Madding Crowd* (London 1967), 240-6.

<sup>54</sup>Wynn, *Timber Colony*, 135-7, 167.

<sup>55</sup>Acheson, *Saint John*, ch. 2.

<sup>56</sup>Saint John Common Council Minutes, 7, 15 June 1838, 5 July 1838, 12 March 1840, microfilm NBM; excerpt in the *Saint John Daily Sun*, 12 April 1887.

<sup>57</sup>Saint John Common Council Minutes, 13 May 1840, 19 March 1842, NBM; *New Brunswick Courier*, 16 May 1840; excerpt in *Saint John Daily Sun*, 12 April 1887. The corporation was congratulated in 1840 for their "liberality." See *Saint John Morning News*, 25 May 1840.

<sup>58</sup>"A Looker On," *New Brunswick Courier*, 7 July 1838; *Saint John Daily Sun*, 18 June 1887.

year, the new Halifax city council conformed to the Saint John practice by superintending a spread for the poor.<sup>59</sup>

The provision of these feasts was based on the premise that a full stomach ensured favourable and loyal sentiments. "A Looker On" observed that Carleton's coronation feast in 1838 produced "an effect on the people, calculated to call forth the best feelings toward the parent state and our youthful and maiden Queen." By the same token, the lieutenant governor of New Brunswick thought that the Queen's marriage celebration in Saint John should involve the poor, and thus "... promote a happy spirit of social union, harmony, and loyalty among them."<sup>60</sup>

Gratuitous feasts can also be understood as an expression of philanthropy. The well-to-do were "goaded by tender consciences and insistent churches" to provide for the poor as a "christian duty." Many believed the maxim that the rich man's "wealth is a talent, for the employment of which he must hereafter render an account."<sup>61</sup> Providers also responded to popular demand; the public expected good deeds during such occasions, just as the English gentry were "obliged by custom to make disbursements for recreations."<sup>62</sup> The *Acadian Recorder* saw the voluntary offerings of the elite during Halifax's coronation celebration in 1838 as

the contribution of all, whom fortune has blessed, with the means of bestowing happiness to others, and testify to the whole world how highly Nova Scotians value the privilege and honour of belonging to the British empire, having a direct interest and concern in the grand constitutional ceremony which consecrates VICTORIA our Queen.<sup>63</sup>

The public feast also had great ritual significance. The selection of the ox as the favoured entrée for these public feasts can partially be explained by its capacity to feed a large number of people, but also by its symbolism. Feasts were based on "mythical or historical events" which were "re-enacted ... through symbols and allegories."<sup>64</sup> According to Hugh Cunningham, roast beef, plum pudding, and ale revived images of John Bull and Merrie England, and were considered part of the English "birthright." In the latter half of the 19th century, Victorians adopted these staples as "sacraments" in a "continuing mythology of national superiority and

<sup>59</sup>Halifax *Acadian Recorder*, 25 April 1840, 2 May 1840; Halifax *Times*, 5 May 1840; Halifax *Times and Courier*, 7 June 1849; Halifax *Times*, 21 December 1841.

<sup>60</sup>"A Looker On," *New Brunswick Courier*, 7 July 1838; *New Brunswick Courier*, 9 May 1840.

<sup>61</sup>Fingard, "The Relief of the Unemployed Poor"; Judith Fingard "Attitudes towards the Education of the Poor in Colonial Halifax," *Acadiensis*, 2 (Spring 1973), 19; Gwenyth Andrews, "The Establishment of Institutional Care in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," Honours essay, Dalhousie University, 1974, 2.

<sup>62</sup>Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations*, 56, 66.

<sup>63</sup>Halifax *Acadian Recorder*, 2 June 1838.

<sup>64</sup>Metraux, "Of Feasts and Carnivals," 7.

class identity.”<sup>65</sup> Ritual significance also accompanied the practice of roasting the ox. In proposing an ox roast for the poor on the Grand Parade in Halifax in 1838, a correspondent referred to it as “an imitation of good old English hospitality.”<sup>66</sup> The ox roast also had pagan roots and, as such, exhibited ritualistic behaviours and traits developed through custom and precedents.<sup>67</sup> Before the barbecue, participants adorned the ox with ribbons in imitation of “sacrificial garlands,” and processed with the animal as during pagan sacrificial rituals.<sup>68</sup> In Saint John in 1838, the ox was led on its cortege by a black man named Jim Brown, probably a butcher, for later he carved the ox after it had been slaughtered and roasted. Butchers often marched with oxen during trades processions, afterwards slaughtering them and distributing the meat as alms.<sup>69</sup>

The class makeup of those who attended these events is difficult to determine. It is clear that the providers were primarily artisanal (in the case of Saint John), and middle class (in the case of Halifax). It is also clear that these providers intended the repasts primarily for the working class and the poor. While the “rich” could “partake [of public feasts] if they pleased,” Alderman John Porter of Saint John contended, the “poor should be especially invited.”<sup>70</sup> Some middle-class feasters did attend, often distancing themselves from the crowds in private marquees and tents. During the Halifax coronation celebration, an exclusive clientele patronized a private marquee on the common, where “Her Majesty’s health was drunk with the utmost possible enthusiasm.” The Charitable Irish Society of Halifax erected a “hospitality tent” during the coronation celebration and the centenary in 1849, where “members could refresh themselves ... and dance.”<sup>71</sup> It is probable, however,

<sup>65</sup> Hugh Cunningham, “The Language of Patriotism, 1750-1914,” *History Workshop*, 11 (1981), 11, 18, 21; for images of John Bull, see Patrick Joyce, *Culture, Society, and Politics* (London 1981), 286-7, 295; Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830-1885* (Toronto 1978), 89.

<sup>66</sup> *Halifax Times*, 29 May 1838. The *Halifax Times*, 28 April 1840 commented re: a dinner and dance given by the St. George’s Society: “For once John Bull forgot to grumble, and did his best to honour his Patron by proving the strength and tension of his digestive faculties, qualities in the composition of Englishmen, which, where roast beef and plum pudding are concerned, are said to be of no mean order.”

<sup>67</sup> Metraux, “Of Feasts and Carnivals,” 8.

<sup>68</sup> *Saint John Daily Telegraph*, 21 April 1883.

<sup>69</sup> *Saint John Daily Telegraph*, 21 April 1883; excerpt in *Saint John Daily Sun*, 18 June 1887; Susan G. Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia 1986), 121. I am unsure whether or not the meat was distributed cooked or uncooked.

<sup>70</sup> *New Brunswick Courier*, 23 May 1840.

<sup>71</sup> Excerpt in *Halifax Acadian Recorder*, 30 June 1887; Charitable Irish Society Minute Book, 25 May 1849, 8 June 1849, PANS; Harvey, “Black Beans, Banners, and Banquets,” 21, 23. For description of such a tent, see Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, 109-11.



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that most of the people who attended ox roasts were working-class in origin, given the increasingly non-respectable image and reputation of such events.

What did outdoor repasts mean to the working-class participants who partook of them? First and foremost, the public feast was a source of free food and drink. As in 18th-century America, ceremonial occasions and holidays determined the type of meal to be eaten by the “lower orders.”<sup>72</sup> Not only did the public dine on ox meat, but other foodstuffs as well. In 1838, Saint John’s common council provided barrels of bread baked into small half-pound loaves, plum pudding, and two hogsheads of ale. During the Queen’s marriage celebration in Saint John in 1840, the people on Saint John’s east side consumed 36 hams, 35 rounds of boiled corn beef, and a large quantity of cheese, as well as 8 roasted sirloins, 1250 pounds of bread, and 120 gallons of wine and ale. In King Square, servers also cut up and distributed a large wedding cake.<sup>73</sup> The prevalence of large fatty joints and sweets, and the paucity of vegetables and fruits, reflects the general nature of the working-class diet in 19th-century America.<sup>74</sup>

Although a Saint John newspaper congratulated the citizens in 1840 for “not having outraged *all* decency,” a little “irregularity” was observed, which suggests that some tried to commandeer more than their fair share, a reflection of the tendency of the poor in pre-industrial Canada to “feast and be merry” during seasons of plenty.<sup>75</sup> Saint John’s *Morning News* satirized the public’s perception of the Queen’s marriage feast as an opportunity for gluttony, in the form of a “letter” written by a “servant” named “Dorothy Prim”:

Tables are to be spread in King and Queen square for the poor people to stuff themselves at; and Sam says I shall have a cut of roast beef, and whatever else is goin. I do hate this livin on Gaspereau all one’s life.<sup>76</sup>

Although this letter was undoubtedly a satirical creation of the editor, it still reflects actual sentiments among the working-class inhabitants of Saint John and Halifax, for they did complain about having to rely on fish.<sup>77</sup> Thus, in this context, the ox roast can be seen as a diversification of the regional working-class diet.

<sup>72</sup>Karsky, “Sustenance and sociability,” 59.

<sup>73</sup>*New Brunswick Courier*, 30 June 1838; *Saint John Weekly Chronicle*, 29 June 1838; Saint John Common Council Minutes, 7, 15 June 1838, NBM; reminiscence in *Saint John Daily Sun*, 18 June 1887; *Saint John Morning News*, 25 May 1840; *New Brunswick Courier*, 30 May 1840. In Carleton, a great deal of food was also eaten.

<sup>74</sup>Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table*, 4-5.

<sup>75</sup>*Saint John Morning News*, 25 May 1840. (Emphasis is mine); Fingard, “The Poor in Winter,” 76.

<sup>76</sup>“Dorothy Prim,” *Saint John Morning News*, 22 May 1840.

<sup>77</sup>See Rev. Dr. Cochran in W.M. Brown, “Recollections of Old Halifax,” *Nova Scotia Historical Society Collections*, 13 (1908), 89.



Homeless children also enjoyed the feast organized in honour of Queen Victoria's marriage in 1840:

Ragged urchins about the streets, were upon the alert much earlier than usual, and strained their treble pipes more outrageously than ever to testify their joyful anticipation of roast beef and cake.<sup>78</sup>

Roast beef and cake were also anticipated by those who found themselves in poor houses and public carceral facilities during public celebrations.

### *Institutional Repast*

— let the poor in the jails forget their sorrows in rejoicing over the entertainment we prepare for them, and let the poor in the poor-house dance for joy and gladness on that day (Cheers).<sup>79</sup>  
(Michael Tobin, Halifax, 1838)

PUBLIC FEASTS not only served to differentiate working-class recipients from respectable artisans and middle-class providers and participants, but also to distinguish the “deserving” from the “undeserving” poor. Victorian middle-class philanthropists portrayed the “deserving” poor as honest and enterprising citizens victimized by illness or misfortune, while the “undeserving” poor were characterized as lazy, profligate, and even criminal.<sup>80</sup> Organizers of public feasts wished to ensure that only the “deserving” poor received victuals, but at public distributions it was difficult to identify the deserving recipients.<sup>81</sup> During a public meeting to consider the celebration of the birth of the Prince of Wales in Halifax in 1841, Samuel G.W. Archibald, the attorney general of Nova Scotia, referred to the disorder of the coronation feast in 1838 which interfered with the orderly distribution of the food.<sup>82</sup> A correspondent of the *New Brunswick Courier* believed that very few poor deserved a feast in honour of the Queen's marriage in 1840 because in Saint John he perceived “very little suffering from poverty, unless it be where poverty and vice are united.”<sup>83</sup>

The distribution of food could be more readily monitored by institutionalizing the public feast. The fragmentation of public feasts into individual dinners for the poor in penal and charitable institutions made them much easier to control than

<sup>78</sup>Saint John *Morning News*, 25 May 1840.

<sup>79</sup>Extract in Halifax *Acadian Recorder*, 20 June 1887.

<sup>80</sup>Fingard, “The Relief of the Unemployed Poor,” 38-9.

<sup>81</sup>Andrews, “The Establishment,” 4.

<sup>82</sup>*Novascotian*, 16 December 1841. Also recall the “irregularities” during the marriage feast in Saint John. See Saint John *Morning News*, 25 May 1840. In 1897 the Halifax *Herald* described a feast for the poor as an “indiscriminate and unintelligent” form of almsgiving. See *Herald*, 5 July 1897.

<sup>83</sup>Letter to editor in *New Brunswick Courier*, 18 April 1840.

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outdoor ox roasts.<sup>84</sup> Thus, provisions for the poor and unfortunate during special occasions frequently took the form of “repasts” in the poor asylums and public carceral facilities. Halifax’s committee for the celebration of Queen Victoria’s coronation in 1838 organized special dinners for inmates of the poor house, the city jail, and the Bridewell. Similarly, the Saint John common council organized a dinner in the gaol and, in 1840, distributed provisions to the almshouse, hospital, asylum, gaol, and workhouse in commemoration of Victoria’s marriage. In Halifax during the nuptial celebration, Nova Scotia’s lieutenant governor, Sir Colin Campbell, donated a supply of beef, bread, and beer to the inmates of the poor asylum and the prisoners in the gaol, and the Charitable Irish Society raised subscriptions for dinners in the poor asylum, the gaol, and the Bridewell. When the Charitable Irish Society entered the poor asylum, they found the “old ranged round the room, children in the centre, and tables ‘literally groaning’ under a profusion of substantial fare.”<sup>85</sup>

Poor houses and penal institutions also marked the Prince of Wales’ *rites de passage* with special feasts and entertainments. The inmates of the asylum, gaol, and Bridewell in Halifax enjoyed special dinners as part of the celebration of the birth of the Prince of Wales in 1841. The Prince of Wales’ visit nineteen years later was observed with a gaol dinner in Saint John and an entertainment in Halifax’s poor asylum. The lieutenant governor of New Brunswick donated provisions to several poor asylums in the province in honour of the Prince’s wedding in 1863, and the Nova Scotia treasury also paid for a dinner at the poor asylum.<sup>86</sup>

Who attended the feasts in these institutions and what functions did they play? The institutions catered to a wide spectrum of working-class inhabitants, ranging from the “under-class” recidivists described by Judith Fingard, to the elderly poor,

<sup>84</sup>Institutional repasts were also a function of the “discovery of the asylum” as an accepted mode of dealing with poverty and other social problems. See Andrews, “The Establishment,” 2, 89; Whalen, “Social Welfare,” 55-6. However, Francis does not think that the Lunatic Asylum was a humane method. See Daniel Francis, “The Development of the Lunatic Asylum in the Maritime Provinces,” *Acadiensis*, 6 (Spring 1977), 23-38.

<sup>85</sup>For the Halifax coronation, see Halifax *Acadian Recorder*, 11 August 1838; for Saint John coronation, see excerpt in Saint John *Daily Sun*, 12 April 1887; for Saint John marriage, see Saint John Common Council Minutes, 14 May 1840, NBM; *New Brunswick Courier*, 16 May 1840; Saint John *Weekly Chronicle*, 29 May 1840; for Halifax marriage, see Halifax *Acadian Recorder*, 11 April 1840; for Charitable Irish Society, see *Novascotian*, 23 April 1840; Halifax *Times*, 21 April 1840; Halifax *Acadian Recorder*, 25 April 1840; Charitable Irish Society Minutes, 9, 27 April 1840, 18 May 1840, PANS.

<sup>86</sup>For birth see *Novascotian*, 16 and 30 December 1841; Halifax *Acadian Recorder*, 25 December 1841; for visit, see Saint John *Morning Sun*, 23 July 1860. Also see entry for a dinner in the poor asylum on the occasion of the Prince’s visit to Nova Scotia in 1860 in Halifax’s Poor Asylum Account Book, August 1860, RG 35-102, 33 B.1, PANS; for wedding, see *St. John Globe*, 11 March 1863; Saint John *Morning News*, 18 March 1863; Halifax’s Poor Asylum Account Book, May 1863. Inmates of the charitable and penal institutions

homeless children, and otherwise well-established artisans who had fallen on hard times. Indeed, poor asylums have been described as “catch-all” institutions.<sup>87</sup> A reporter described the different categories of recipients who sat down to a repast in the Saint John asylum in 1863:

... such inmates as were able to move sat down to the sumptuous repast provided for them. The sight was truly interesting. At one table might be seen the poor, decrepid old man, at another the child of misfortune; at one table the emaciated youth, at another, the enfeebled woman.<sup>88</sup>

Judith Fingard has discovered that some poor inhabitants arranged to enter the poor house and the prison in order to take advantage of special dinners, as well as for protection and security.<sup>89</sup> The poor debtors in the gaols who did not have the resources to buy bread, and had to rely on rations from other prisoners, undoubtedly welcomed these celebratory meals.<sup>90</sup> Institutional feasts were also significant for those who were used to a more substantial diet. An inmate of the Saint John poor house, who had recently fallen from relative respectability as an artisan, commented that “the victuals here is bad and the allowance not half enough for anyone in health.”<sup>91</sup>

Regardless of need, inmates expected to be treated “properly” during these dinners in the institutions.<sup>92</sup> The gaol commissioners in Saint John prepared a special meal for the prisoners during the Prince of Wales’ visit in 1860, consisting of salmon, roast beef, vegetables, plum pudding, and a keg of ale. However, two or three “turbulent spirits” led by an elderly debtor named Barney O’Brien, managed to convince the other prisoners in the upper hall *not* to attend the dinner because they were not being treated like *gentlemen*. They contended that it would not be “dignified” to sit down to a feast unless one of the gaol committee or at least the high sheriff presided at the table as chairman. Participation would also be considered if they were provided with the “proper appendage” — a gallon of

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continued to receive special meals during the celebrations of Queen Victoria’s jubilees in the late Victorian era. See Halifax *Acadian Recorder*, 20 June 1887; Saint John *Daily Echo*, 14 May 1897; Halifax *Herald*, 25 June 1897.

<sup>87</sup>Whalen, “Social Welfare,” 60; Judith Fingard defends her use of the term “under class” in the introduction to *The Dark Side of Life*.

<sup>88</sup>*New Brunswick Courier*, 14 March 1863.

<sup>89</sup>Fingard, *The Dark Side of Life*, 52, 54-5, 57.

<sup>90</sup>John Smith to Mayor Robert Hazen, 17 April 1838, in Robert F. Hazen papers, Box 1, Shelf 36, Packet 2, #15, NBM.

<sup>91</sup>James Thompson to the North British Society, 16 November 1838, in Records of the North British Society, MG 20, vol. 253, no. 185A, PANS.

<sup>92</sup>Fingard, *The Dark Side of Life*, 51.

whiskey. Unfortunately, their protest came to naught, and the next day their share was fed to the prisoners in the lower hall.<sup>93</sup>

Thus, the organization of special feasts for the inmates of the poor relief and penal institutions can be understood as a more rational and controlled means of providing for the poor during public celebrations. Inmates utilized these feasts as sources of much-needed “victuals,” and Barney O’Brien and his conspirators even attempted to use the repast as a vehicle for the attainment of working-class respectability.

### *Tea and Coffee Soirée*

FOR ANOTHER SEGMENT of the population, none of these forms of feasting sufficed. They provided an alternative — the tea and coffee soirée.

Why would people turn away from the customary feast and search for an alternative? Changing palates may have led to a gradual shift in eating patterns and preferences. Among the articulate, the popularity of roast beef and plum pudding waned by the late 1840s. One commentator commented in 1849 that “John Bull ... has taken uncommonly to eating turkey and potatoes [two American dishes] for his Christmas dinner, although he continues to swear by roast beef and plum pudding before strangers.” He went on to suggest that

we Nova Scotians should adopt the fare so liberally awarded to us for our national dish, and serve it up as a *pièce de résistance* for the benefit of those who may drop in upon us with the laudable desire to write a book about `the manners and customs of the Nova Scotians.’<sup>94</sup>

The changing palates of the residents was accompanied by a growing concern over the manner in which the ox was cooked, primarily the waste involved in roasting the whole animal, and the aesthetics of the practice.<sup>95</sup> In 1838, the *Novascotian* thought that the “days of ox-roasting may as well go after the days of chivalry.”<sup>96</sup> As ox roasts became more sporadic, the knowledge of how to cook the animals properly gradually disappeared. The Charitable Irish Society tried to roast an ox in Halifax during the coronation in 1838, but it was eventually disposed of, probably due to over-cooking.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>93</sup>Report of Justice Balloch to a meeting of the sessions in Saint John *Morning News*, 5 September 1860; Saint John *Freeman*, 6 September 1860.

<sup>94</sup>“Ventriloquus,” Halifax *British Colonist*, 24 May 1849. Similarly, another Haligonian contended that the “youngsters” of the late Victorian age would “turn their noses up” at the barrels of gingerbread (plum pudding) which were served during the coronation celebration in 1838. See “Doesticks,” Halifax *Acadian Recorder*, 10 July 1897.

<sup>95</sup>See the mayor’s comments in *New Brunswick Courier*, 28 March 1840, and Alderman Porter’s remarks in 23 May 1840. There was also concern about the waste and excess of festivals in early modern Europe. See, Burke, *Popular Culture*, 213.

<sup>96</sup>*Novascotian*, 5 July 1838.

<sup>97</sup>Halifax *Times*, 3 July 1838.

The effects of urbanization also help to explain the erosion of public feasts. Ox roasts were initially a product of pre-Victorian times, when Saint John (and Halifax) resembled a “collection of small market villages.”<sup>98</sup> But the “village atmosphere” which had generated communal feasts was changing in the 19th century. One of the most obvious victims of urban growth was the ward system of civic government and, by extension, many of the ox roasts which had been organized by the common council and held in the individual wards. In 1863, the Saint John common council declined the suggestion made by Alderman Robinson to provide each ward with a grant toward “furnishing the poor of the ward with dinner at public expense” in celebration of the Prince of Wales’ nuptials. Instead, Alderman Robinson personally provided food and drink for the poor of his Sydney ward and other wards as well.<sup>99</sup> Despite this isolated display of paternalism, communal ward activities like ox roasts were being superseded by city-wide spectacles organized by a more impersonal civic administration.

Public feasting also suffered from the effects of 19th-century moral reformism. Beginning in the 1820s, Halifax and Saint John experienced the emergence of evangelical, temperance, and rational recreation movements. While these causes found support at all social levels, abstinence and prohibition were taken up in force by the evangelical elements of the lower middle and respectable working classes. Besides an array of temperance organizations, a reformist clique called the “puritan liberals” emerged on the Saint John common council who were committed to temperance and purity in public life. The Halifax city council also demonstrated a growing commitment to the bourgeois ideals of efficiency and progress.<sup>100</sup>

Reformers displayed a variety of responses to public feasting and drinking. Some reformers had no use at all for public festivities, particularly when they functioned as gratuitous charities. The emerging bourgeoisie in Victorian England experienced considerable tension between work and leisure, accentuated for those with the evangelical convictions of the “Protestant work ethic.” Public entertainments such as feasts were considered to be frivolous and irreconcilable with the

<sup>98</sup>Acheson, *Saint John*, 5. An ox was roasted in many pre-Victorian celebrations in Saint John, including the defeat of Napoleon in May 1814, the coronation of George IV in October 1821, and the ascension of William IV. See J.V. Saunders, “Early New Brunswick Celebrations,” *New Brunswick Historical Society Newsletter*, 24 (November 1987), 3-4; *New Brunswick Courier*, 13 October 1821. In this sense they resembled the roasts held during village fairs and festivals. See Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations*, 59-64.

<sup>99</sup>Saint John Common Council Minutes, 7 March 1863, NBM; compare this to the 50th anniversary of the landing of the loyalists in Saint John in 1833, when the mayor provided a special feast for the poor at his own expense. See *Saint John City Gazette*, 16 and 23 May 1833; For Alderman Porter, see *St. John Globe*, 11 March 1863; *New Brunswick Courier*, 14 March 1863.

<sup>100</sup>For puritan liberals, see Acheson, *Saint John*, 181-2; for Halifax city council, see Janet Guildford, “Public School Reform and the Halifax Middle Class, 1850-1870,” PhD thesis, Dalhousie University, 1990.

“dignity of labour.” Indeed, a familiar maxim advised that the “truest charity is to find employment that will give food; and not food without employment.” The feast tended to induce idleness, drinking, and other slothful qualities.<sup>101</sup>

Some reformers reconciled the tension between this demoralizing frivolity and the sanctity of work by either attempting to modify or change existing celebrations, or by providing alternative rational recreations. Temperance and abstinence reformers centred on drink as the primary concern. Some moderates advocated a simple reduction in the amount of liquor consumed, while other “distinguished patricians” of the temperance cause in Saint John, such as Charles Simonds and John Gray, moved for a restriction of the type of alcohol served, finding nothing wrong with ale and wine, but drawing the line at hard liquors.<sup>102</sup>

The arrival in the 1840s of the American fraternal temperance organization called the Sons of Temperance facilitated the movement toward abstinence as a form of social control. These abstainers thought that public celebrations should be changed into more rational and orderly events by prohibiting the use of alcohol. The *Morning Sun* spoke of the influence of temperance on public recreations:

The general effect which ‘Temperance principles’ have on some of these occasions, and perhaps on all of them to some extent, go far to remove old objections to such modes of recreation. The great blame of festive occasions, was that of the miserable cup of intoxication; — prohibit that, and man enjoys himself, generally as a respectable creature.<sup>103</sup>

Alderman Salter, a puritan liberal on Saint John’s common council, objected to the availability of intoxicating beverages at the marriage celebration in Saint John in 1840. He believed that the common council would not be setting a good example for their constituents by encouraging intemperance in this way. He saw drunkenness at the ox roast in Carleton in 1838 and had no doubt that again many would go away “gloriously drunk.” He advocated a more “rational and consistent” celebration which avoided unnecessary noise, confusion, and intemperance: “Englishmen might not get drunk on ale, because they were accustomed to it; but Bluenoses might, and the temptation might be very dangerous.” He did not approve

<sup>101</sup>For Protestant work ethic, see Bailey, *Leisure and Class*, 5; Fingard, “The Relief of the Unemployed Poor,” 36. A correspondent of the *Halifax Herald* opposed holding a feast for the poor during Queen Victoria’s diamond jubilee celebration in 1897 because it undermined the “pride and spirit of self-reliance” of the deserving poor. See *Herald*, 5 July 1897.

<sup>102</sup>The *Novascotian*, 10 December 1840, commented regarding the reduction of whiskey consumed at a fair in Ireland: “How much of confusion, and quarrelling, of profane swearing, and loss of time, and of evils, was avoided by leaving the difference between 8 gallons and 8 puncheons unswallowed”; for selective policy, see Acheson, *Saint John*, 146.

<sup>103</sup>*Halifax Morning Sun*, 20 July 1846, as quoted in David Francis Howell, “A History of Horse Racing in Halifax, N.S., 1749-1867,” MSc thesis, Dalhousie University, 1972, 44.



of the loyalty of the bottle, but preferred “sober, honest” loyalty.<sup>104</sup> However, fellow puritan liberals Aldermen Porter and John Humbert, and “populist conservatives” such as Gregory Vanhorne, Thomas Harding, and Assistant Aldermen William Hagarty and Ewan Cameron spoke out in favour of the feast.<sup>105</sup> Alderman Porter saw little drunkenness at the coronation. He “would let the poor have a good glass of ale if they wished it,” and did not think it would do them any harm. Indeed, the majority of the aldermen voted in favour of a conventional feast for the celebration of Queen Victoria’s marriage in 1840.<sup>106</sup>

Other proponents of temperance and abstinence suggested offering more rational alternative events, such as temperance soirées. These attractions did not merely offer free food and entertainment, but also instruction and thereby respectability.<sup>107</sup> Offended by the drunkenness during public celebrations, the St. John Temperance Society organized a tea and coffee soirée during Queen’s Victoria’s coronation celebration in Saint John in 1838, as did the Provincial Temperance Society and the St. John Auxiliary to the New Brunswick Foreign Temperance Society in 1840 to celebrate the Queen’s nuptials.<sup>108</sup> The programs were pseudo-religious and instructive, incorporating hymns, band music, and discourses on themes ranging from temperance to “Our Laws” and the “British Constitution.” The messages of many of these speeches reinforced middle-class family values and separate spheres ideology. During the soirée in celebration of the Queen’s marriage, Captain O’Halloran delivered an oration on “Matrimony” in which he urged those who had not yet been “tyed by Hymen” to follow the illustrious example of their Queen and Prince Consort.<sup>109</sup> These temperance entertainments were attended by a number of women, who also joined the ranks of the temperance organizations. In 1840, Sir John Harvey congratulated the tea and coffee meeting for the large proportion of women present. He echoed the sentiments of the “cult of true womanhood,” referring to women as “the good angels of the other sex sent to win them back to the ways of Purity and Peace.”<sup>110</sup>

<sup>104</sup> This connection between drunkenness and loyalty can be traced back to at least 1809, when the press commented regarding King George III’s jubilee: “It is not amidst intoxication ... that we are to look for that steady or enthusiastic loyalty which is at once the pledge and test of popular allegiance.” See Colley, “The Apotheosis of George III,” 117.

<sup>105</sup> For a discussion of these aldermen, see Acheson, *Saint John*, 181-2.

<sup>106</sup> For debate, see *New Brunswick Courier* 23 May 1840.

<sup>107</sup> Bailey, *Leisure and Class*, 39, 42; Acheson, *Saint John*, 159.

<sup>108</sup> Although there were no soirées in Halifax for the public celebrations in question, they were becoming popular events there as well. The *Novascotian*, 9 December 1841, recommended a soirée as an event for the celebration of the birth of the Prince of Wales.

<sup>109</sup> *Saint John Morning News*, 27 May 1840.

<sup>110</sup> In Saint John, women served as members of the “Saint John Total Abstinence Society.” They composed 40 per cent of the organization before 1835, less than 25 per cent after that date, and edged up to 30 per cent in 1840. See Acheson, *Saint John*, 144. Women also formed their own “Ladies’ Total Abstinence Society for the City and County of Saint John,” which



The food served at the temperance soirées was of a lighter fare than that associated with ox roasts, banquets, and institutional repasts, with tea and coffee as the only liquid refreshments, perhaps reflecting the influence of American food reformers as well as temperance advocates.<sup>111</sup> Although organized by temperance societies, the events were probably attended by abstainers as well, for temperance supporters had no qualms about using ale.<sup>112</sup> One guest contended that the atmosphere did not suffer because of the lack of alcohol: "we may safely defy Port or Madeira to impart to their votaries more genuine hilarity and social feelings than were inspired by these fragrant productions of the East." Instead of a drunken display, the coronation meeting was a source of "rational intercourse" and a "feast of reason for the soul." The guest concluded: "long live Victoria to share the affections of such a loyal people, and long live the Temperance Cause to suggest so rational a mode of expressing those feelings." The success of the temperance soirées in 1838 and 1840 ensured its continuation as a "regular feature of temperance life" in Saint John.<sup>113</sup>

Moral reformers in the temperance and abstinence camps were not entirely successful in regulating popular behaviour during celebrations. The inherent class bias of their organizations posed one of the most serious problems. While reformers condemned the nature of public feasts and tried to change them in an effort to contribute to the improvement and elevation of the general public, their efforts at individual reformation, and the provision of alternative forms of celebrating, catered more to people of their "own kind," that is, the middle class and particularly the respectable working class. William Baird contended that the "more important work for the members of the Division [Sons of Temperance] seemed to be the reformation of talented and influential men, whose example was producing a most damaging effect."<sup>114</sup> The restriction of attendance at the soirées reflected this class bias, as tickets were first offered to members of the temperance societies and then to the general public.<sup>115</sup> An "insistence upon certain prerequisites of conduct and appearance" at the events further excluded "the unscrubbed." At a time of heightened social extremes, attempts to ameliorate and elevate the lower orders were jeopardised by many middle-class citizens who were more concerned with reinforcing not reducing social distance.<sup>116</sup>

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submitted a temperance petition to the legislature in 1847. See Campbell, "Disenfranchised but not Quiescent," 37; *New Brunswick Courier*, 30 May 1840.

<sup>111</sup>Levenstein, *The Revolution at the Table*, ch. 4.

<sup>112</sup>Acheson, *Saint John*, 145.

<sup>113</sup>"A Guest," *New Brunswick Courier*, 30 June 1838; for temperance life, see Acheson, *Saint John*, 146.

<sup>114</sup>William I. Baird, *Seventy Years of New Brunswick Life* (Saint John 1890), 162, Saint John Regional Library (SJRL); Reminiscence of Eliza Donkin, NBM.

<sup>115</sup>*New Brunswick Courier*, 23 June 1838, 18 April 1840, 22 25 May 1840.

<sup>116</sup>For prerequisites, see Bailey, *Leisure and Class*, 105; Because of "mischievous conduct," no youths were permitted at the temperance meetings in Halifax in 1843 unless accompanied

### Conclusion

PUBLIC FEASTING and drinking in Saint John and Halifax obviously reflected and reinforced the more general pattern of mid-Victorian diversity and class differentiation. In the first place, each type of feasting supported a very different class of recipient: the banquet was attended largely by the middle class, the ox roast by the general public (particularly the working class), the institutional repast by the “institutionalized poor” (representing a wide spectrum of working-class citizens), and the temperance soir e by the lower middle and upper working classes.

The food, drink, and attendant ritualism of these different types of public feasts also expressed hierarchy and defined the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. The structure and content of French *haute cuisine* and the drinking and toasting rituals at middle-class banquets symbolized the respectability and exclusivity of the dinners. The ox roast, on the other hand, revived images of Merrie England and John Bull paternalism. There is evidence, however, that the working-class recipients interpreted the ox roast in a more pragmatic utilitarian fashion: as a source of free food and drink, and as a vehicle of respectability. Finally, the soir e’s juxtaposition of tea, coffee, and instruction against the alcohol, heavier fare, and drunkenness of the banquet, ox roast, and institutional repast permitted respectable working-class temperance advocates to separate themselves from the gluttony of the “gentry” and the vulgarity of the “masses.”

Social distance was also reinforced by accessibility; middle-class participants could attend just about any form of festivity they wished (indeed, they organized most of the ox roasts and institutional repasts). The lower classes, however, were blocked from attending the balls and banquets, the temperance soir es, and institutional repasts, as organizers instituted various forms of “screening,” such as high ticket prices and availability, codes of dress and etiquette, and evidence of deservedness.

This desire for social distance intensified by the 1860s, as middle-class and respectable working-class organizers began appropriating more of the celebration budgets for their own exclusive banquets. In other words, they transformed “feasts of participation” into “feasts of representation.”<sup>117</sup> You will recall that £210 of a total £250 appropriated for the celebration of the Queen’s marriage celebration in Saint John in 1840 was expended on outdoor feasts for the poor; however, by 1860, the organizing committee for the Prince of Wales’ visit to Halifax spent over half of their £4579/13s/1d on the grand ball and banquet.<sup>118</sup> The *St. John Globe* of 1863 commented on the changing priorities of celebration committees:

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by a parent or guardian, or signed in by a member. See Halifax *Morning Herald*, 31 May 1843; for social distance, see Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations*, 164.

<sup>117</sup> Metraux, “Of Feasts and Carnivals,” 8-9.

<sup>118</sup> A sum of £2530/17s/9d was expended on the ball and banquet — Financial account at the end of the Minutes of the Meetings of the Committee for the Reception of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, 1860, MG1, 312A, PANS.

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A provision to give a good dinner to the poor was voted down, that two or three hundred of the elite, including the Common Council, may be able to enjoy a dance. Was there ever anything more heartless or cruel?<sup>119</sup>

The end result of this “gentrification” of public celebrations was that, by the late 19th century, few alternatives save private picnics and treats remained for the general public and poor who “measured improvement” by the “bellyful.”<sup>120</sup>

*This paper has been a long time in coming and has undergone many changes and revisions. I would like to thank Dr. Judith Fingard for her untiring efforts to help me with several versions of an earlier paper, and Dr. Scott See, whose encouraging remarks, as a CHA commentator, gave me the confidence to submit this article for publication*

<sup>119</sup>*St. John Globe*, 7 March 1863. In the column “Things Talked Of in Halifax,” the *Halifax Reporter*, 11 April 1863, had a similar “beef”:

The provincial funds, the peoples’ money, the public chest must be freely bled to give a few (who least deserve it) a luncheon, a jollification, a swig at a champagne glass, while the same amount spent in providing comforts for the many needy and poor persons in the city, would be the means of bringing gladness and joy to the hearts of those who are in want.

<sup>120</sup>Bailey, *Leisure and Class*, 89.

**Figure 1**

## List of Guests for Corporation Dinner at Coronation, Saint John 1838

Mayor	Robert F. Hazen
Recorder	William B. Kinnear
6 Aldermen —	Henry Porter, John Humbert, Thomas Harding, Gregory Van Horne, Robert Salter, George Bond
6 Assistants —	John Knollin, Lewis W. Durant, Wm Haggerty, Ewan Cameron, Thomas Coram, Joseph Beatteay
Common Clerk	James Peters jr.
Dy Common Clerk	James William Boyd
Sheriff	James White
Coroner	James T. Hanford
Hon. William Black	Legislative Council
Hon. Hugh Johnson	Executive Council
Hon. Charles Simonds	ditto
Mr. Barlow	Thomas, House of Assembly for Saint John City
Mr. Woodward	Isaac, ditto ditto
Mr. Partelow	John R., House of Assembly, St. John County
Mr. Jordan	John, ditto ditto
Lt. Col. Benjamin L. Peters	Saint John City Militia, 1st Batt
Lt. Col. Charles Ward	ditto Rifle Batt
Lt. Col. George Anderson	St. John County Regt
President of the Bank of N.B.	Solomon Nichols
President of the City Bank	Thomas Leavitt
President of the Whaling Co	Thomas Nisbet
President of the Water Co	Lauchlan Donaldson
Chief Justice	Hon. Ward Chipman
Judge Parker	Robert, Supreme Court
Coll. of Her Maj's Customs	Henry Bowyer Smith
Master of the Rolls	Hon. Neville Parker
President of St. George's Soc, John V. Thurgar	
President of St. Andrew's Soc, John Robertson	
President of St. Patrick's Soc, Thomas L. Nicholson	
Rev. B. G. Gray	Benjamin G., Rector of Saint John, Anglican
Rev. Mr. Gray	I.W.D.?, AM Asst Missionary at Saint John
Rev. Mr. Coster	Ven George, AM, Archdeacon, Church of England or Frederick, rector of Carleton
Rev. Robert Wilson	Church of Scotland, Saint John
Rev. Enoch Wood	Wesleyan, head for Saint John Station

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Rev. Stephen Bamford	Wesleyan, Supernumerary
Re. Mr. Dunphy	James, Catholic, Saint John
Treasurer B. Robinson	
Judge of Probate	Henry Swymmer, surrogate, Saint John
Attorney General	Hon. Charles Jeffrey Peters
President of St. John Marine Ins, J. Kirk	
President of St. John Bridge Co, W.H. Street <sup>121</sup>	
Col. Goldie	C. Leigh, CB, 11th Regt, Army
Col. Bishop	Lt. Col., Commandant, 11th
Col. Mercer, R.A.	
Commissary W.H. Robinson	William, Asst Commissary General
Commissary Goldsmith	Oliver, ditto
Cap. Whinyates	Frederick W., Commanding Royal Engineers
Cap. Evans, RA	Mark
Cap. Armstrong, RA	
Lt. Gordon, RA	
Serg Major Shombray	
Cap. Richmond	M., 11th
Cap. Richardson	I., 11th
Lt. Moore	E., Adjutant, 11th
Lt. Gould	Goold, James, 11th
Lt. Colburn	Cockburn, Alexander, 11th
Lt. Boyd	Lewis A., 11th
Lt. Brown	Browne, Alexander, 11th
Paymaster Boyd	Alexander H., 11th
Quarter Master Worsley	
Ensign Cox	Symes, 11th
Town Major John Gallagher	
Mr. Frith, Ordnance	Frederick C., Ordnance Dept, Store Keeper and Barrack Master, Army
Hon. E. Botsford	Amos E., Executive and Legislative Councils
Col. Otty	Allen, Commandant, Saint John Sea Fencibles
Mr. Grant, Coll, St. Andrews	Alexander, Collector, Port of St. Andrews
John Ward, Sr., Esq.	Merchant (timber), Shipowner <sup>122</sup>
George Harding, Esq.	Merchant <sup>123</sup>
Daniel Ansley, Esq.	Tanner <sup>124</sup>
Craven Calvary, Esq.	Victualler <sup>125</sup>

<sup>121</sup>In the *Almanack*, 1838, he is a director; John Robertson is the president.

<sup>122</sup>Acheson, *Saint John*, 52, 63.

<sup>123</sup>Card catalogue, under "Harding, George," SJRL.

<sup>124</sup>Register of Voters, 1809, Shelf 46, SJRL.

<sup>125</sup>Register of Voters, 1785-1862, Shelf 46, 13, SJRL.

Isaac Olive, Esq.

Mr. John Clark, Sr.

Benjamin Stanton, Esq.

Shipbuilder<sup>126</sup>Baker<sup>127</sup>Blacksmith/Shoemaker<sup>128</sup>

The information in the left column was transcribed from "List of Guests for Corporation Dinner at Coronation, 1838," in Robert F. Hazen Papers, Box 2 Shelf 36, File 15, #29, [NBM]. The information in the right column was collected from the *New Brunswick Almanack* (Saint John 1838, 1839), except where noted.

<sup>126</sup>Ward Scrapbook, 2nd lot, Shelf 19, 356, 357, SJRL.

<sup>127</sup>D.R. Jack, *New Brunswick Families, Especially of Loyalist Descent*, Vol. 1, 220-1, SJRL.

<sup>128</sup>Register of Voters, 1795, Shelf 46, SJRL.

**Figure 2**  
Taken from: Vertical file Vol 77, #12, [PANS].

