New Brunswick workers in the early 20th century
ALMOST DAILY, newspapers carry articles that touch on a wide-range of workplace issues. Pensions, unemployment, wages, health, and safety are but a few of the challenges facing employers and employees alike. Such stories may prompt readers to ask what life was like for workers before employment insurance, minimum wage laws, workers’ compensation, and other regulations offered protection from weak economies, workplace injuries, and low wages.

The evidence taken before the New Brunswick Factory Commission (RS250), housed at the Provincial Archives, offers a snapshot of the province’s industrial workplace at the turn of the 20th century. Created by order-in-council, in June 1904, the commission was appointed to investigate working conditions in the province’s manufacturing establishments and suggest amendments to a bill to protect factory workers. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the workplace was being scrutinized by social reformers who were concerned about problems stemming from industrialization and urbanization. The large number of factory workers, reports of industrial accidents, claims of unsanitary working conditions, and the visibility of urban child workers encouraged them to press for the passage of labour laws.

The human labour issue was troubling. Employers began to question the regulations offered protection from weak laws, workers’ compensation, and other employment insurance, minimum wage laws. Reformers, community leaders, parents, and even employers began to question the hiring of boys and girls. Many thought that youths should go to school instead of toil long hours for low pay.

A group of men and women at Saint John, the province’s largest industrial centre, led the charge for labour reform. They included the trade unionist, Peter C. Shankley; the businessman, W. Franklin Hatheway; and the woman’s rights activist, Emma S. Fiske, who represented, respectively, the Saint John Trades and Labour Council, the Fabian League, and the Saint John Council of Women. These reformers and others campaigned—in the press, by public meetings, and through face-to-face meetings with politicians—to improve working conditions. Their activities culminated in the drafting of a bill entitled, “for the Protection of Employees in Factories” and the appointment of a factory commission.

During the summer, fall, and winter of 1904-1905, the commission visited Saint John, Fredericton, Marysville, St. Stephen, Newcastle, Chatham, Woodstock, Campbellton, and Moncton, gathering evidence from factory owners, workers, and others. Its findings were to be used to fine-tune the factory act bill before the House. Today, the evidence commissioned offers researchers insights into industrial practices and labour conditions in an unregulated workplace.

The five factory commissioners—boot and shoe manufacturer, John Palmer; lumberman and sawmill owner, Kilgour Shives; managing director of Saint John Iron Works, Charles Macdonald; longshoreman and union leader, Michael J. Kelly; and teacher and woman’s suffrage supporter, Emma S. Fiske—asked questions about hours of work, sanitary conditions, workplace safety, air quality, lunchrooms, and child labour.

The commissioners began hearing evidence, at Saint John, on 11 August 1904. Cigar manufacturer, Abram Jacobs, stated that his 60 or so employees worked by the piece. They started work at 7:30 a.m. and finished about 5:00 or 6:00 p.m., depending upon how quickly they finished their assigned tasks. His two-story building had no fire extinguishers or fire escapes and only two
able dust and smoke, and emery wheels burned their hands, there was “considerable danger. Moulders could work overtime, employees were paid time and a half for lunch, and a 60 hour week, Monday through Saturday, then the Monday to Friday hours could be lengthened.

With respect to workplace health and safety, the act made provision for fire escapes, fire extinguishers, guards for machinery, and clean water closets, but not for lunchrooms. Paid holidays, a minimum wage, and improved compensation benefits for injured workers would have to wait for future considerations.

JANET COOK

Janice Cook
New resources for Labour History in New Brunswick

Organizations and heritage institutions have been central to the project, and the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick has been an active participant from the beginning. Two of the project’s major undertakings have benefited from the support of the PANB and have helped to enrich the resources available to Archives users.

A preliminary inventory of the NBFL fonds, MC229, was completed in 2005 by researchers working under the supervision of archives staff. Most records in this collection relate to the years since the 1970s, but one particularly important resource is a nearly complete set of proceedings from Federation conventions, including handwritten minutes from January 1914. This source allows researchers to follow the concerns and policies of the provincial house of labour throughout the past century and to document the changing structure of organized labour in the province. The fonds also includes tape recordings of the Federation conventions dating back to 1965 that capture the convention debates in lively detail. Among the highlights identified to date are speeches by visitors such as New Brunswick Premier Louis J. Robichaud and César Chavez of the California farm workers.

Another major oral history resource is the collection of more than 75 interviews prepared by the LHTNB staff, students and researchers. These form part of the research and administrative records of the project, the LHTNB fonds, MC3477. The interviews range from stories of work at the Chestnut Canoe and Hartt Shoe factories in Fredericton through to personal accounts by union activists from many parts of the province. A large number of the interviews focus on the history of nurses, a result of the project’s partnership with the Nurses Association of New Brunswick and the New Brunswick Nurses Union.

The interviews follow a questionnaire that explores individual biographies, family life and work experience and, where relevant, participation in unions and other public activities. Archives staff provided technical assistance and advice, organizing a training workshop for the student assistants who conducted many of the interviews. The interviews were recorded as digital files, and all interviews were fully transcribed prior to deposit. The collection includes transcripts of the French-language interviews conducted by researchers based at the Université de Moncton; these are deposited at the Centre d'études académiques in Moncton.

As a result of the project’s work, new research has continued to appear in several forms. The project website includes features such as “Life and Work in Stanley Parish at the Time of the Great War”, “Women’s Work in the New Brunswick Lumber Camps”, “Minto, 1934”, “Escuminac, 1959”, “How Nurses Learned to Wear Two Hats”, “Hot Cargo, 1979” and others. Several books and articles prepared by the project are available online through the “Our Publications” tab on the site. As long as the supply lasts, printed copies of two bilingual booklets, Early Presidents of the New Brunswick Federation of Labour, 1913-1964 and Informing Public Policy: Socio-Economic and Historical Perspectives on Labour in New Brunswick, are available on request from the project director. Meanwhile, additional work is in preparation, including a book-length history of the New Brunswick Federation of Labour, which will be published, in both English and French editions, in time for the Federation’s centennial year in 2013.

David Frank,
director of the LHTNB Project, is a professor of history at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton (dfrank@unb.ca). The project website is located at www.lhtnb.ca.

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Annual General Meeting of the Associates scheduled for May 16 in Shippsagan

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the Associates of the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick will be held at 6:30 on May 16, 2012 at the Centre Universitaire de Moncton, Campus de Shippsagan, Amphithéâtre Gisèle McGray. A number of reports will be presented, including that of the President on the activities of the year, and the election of members to the Board of Directors will take place. At this meeting the Associates, in conjunction with the Société historique Nicolas-Densys, will host the launch of the Mgr Donat Robichaud Genealogical and Historical Research Collection which the Associates partnered in developing. It will be mounted on the Provincial Archives Web Site and will bring to the web a database of excerpts from New Brunswick’s first Acadian newspaper, l’Évangéline, and genealogical and historical information related to families who settled in the northeastern part of the province.

Members of the Associates and the general public are invited to attend.
Many hands make light work

NOT ALL LABOUR was done in factories and mills. The diaries of Alice B. Wiggins offer a portrait of a young girl growing up in rural New Brunswick at the beginning of the 20th century and underscore the fact that children contributed to the household economy. These extracts, which begin in 1903 when she was 14, note her household activities and the social events that she and her family attended. Alice documents her father’s work as a blacksmith as well as the assistance that she, her mother, and siblings gave him during busy times. She notes that he and her brothers hunted, fished, harvested crops, and worked at the shingle mill and that local men found seasonal employment, working in lumber camps and on log drives. Occasionally, she mentions a labour-related accident.

February 1903
Mon 9 – Thur 12 At home cutting mat rags
Fri 13 Cutting mat rags in the morning out costing (coasting) in afternoon
Sat 14 At home & to the crossroad to church
Mon 16 – Tues 17 Hooking all day
Wed 18 Doing housework & hooking
Thur 19 Hooking in the forenoon & out sporting in the afternoon
Sun 22 To Mrs. Burns meeting in the morning, at Sandry School [in afternoon]
Mon 23 – Fri 27 At home hooking
March 1903
Thur 5 At home in forenoon. Out costing (coasting) in afternoon
Sat 7 At home. Out costing (coasting) in evening
Tues 10 At home all day pie-cutting patch
Anne & Alma were out in the evening working
Sat 13 Papa had his fingers cut off in March 1903
Sun 14 At home & to the crossroad to church
Wed 17 Davyton’s Steam Engine came up on train, Rux Brown done in woods today. Doing housework – mill started
August 1903
Mon 3 – Tues 4 At home & to get berries in afternoon
Fri 5 At home & to get my lesson. Bessie is here visiting. Sun 9 To Band in the morning, to SS (Sunday School) in afternoon, Theora & Tully was up on a visit.
September 1903
Fri 15 At home. Renee & Leila W. here,
Aunt Mary Hallett spinning; out to practice in evening. Annie & I with old Nell (horse) & Effie & Leila with Howard (horse), Papa & Cecil hunting on Macnaquac [Mactaquac]. Sat 16 To Aunt Mary’s – out on the Li’s (?) steam. Stayed with children the rest of the morning, SKN there a few minutes.
Anne & Uncle All & children, Minnie Gorham, SKN & I went to exhibition in afternoon & to call on Theora. All went together.

Tribute to a volunteer

JIM O’NEILL, at 81, is a relatively new volunteer at the Provincial Archives. His background suits him ideally for the project he has undertaken to identify the photographs of the late Gleaner photographer, Jim Brown. Jim is a life-long resident of Fredericton, a retired fireman who served as Deputy Chief of the Fredericton Fire Department, as did his father before him. An amateur historian he has had a great interest in musical and other entertainments in Fredericton and is an expert on circus history. He built, to scale and from scratch, the largest model circus in the country with the help of his late wife, Gilberta, who sewed the tents. With incredible attention to detail and an equally incredible memory, he not only recognizes images, he has many related facts and stories to bring to their description.

Twila Buttimer
Three retiring employees

Department, in the New Brunswick
emails and comments by people in the
sociable and outgoing. All three were
demonstrated a concern for their fellow
and practical approach to helping make
the Archives’ mission and took a positive
They all demonstrated a commitment to
settled into archival work without delay.
they put to good use for the Archives.
know how it operates and
knowledge they had gained of
Supplies and Services. They brought
native Charlotte County was excellent
political life, of government, and his
in supporting the Archives’ excellent
was always looking for ways to make
improvements in the quality of our
services. Paula’s creative imagination
and her artistic talents were invaluable in
her work assignation with the Associates
whether assisting with membership
and marketing or organizing meetings
and events. Paula took Saturday shifts
in the Reference Services Unit which
her genuine interest in people and her
willingness to help, qualities she brought
to her interaction with colleagues as well,
were much appreciated.

New Finding Aids

Government Records
R618 Carleton County Registry Office Records. (Revised.) Business,north partnerships, registrations and dissolutions.
R514 Vital Statistics Records Indexes. 1927-1962. (Revised.)
Added Births and Late Registrations of Birth; 197; Marriages 1972; Deaths 1976.

Private Sector Records
LABOUR
MCG20 Richard Moore fonds. (4 cm) Account book, 1872-1891, of
Moore, a blacksmith in Mechanic Settlement, Kings County. Includes customers’ names, service rendered and materials used; charges, dates of payments.
MCG95 John Moore (b. 1854, d. 1914). Diary excerpt (transcription
1993 p.), 3 October 1874 to March 1875. Brother of Richard (MCG95 above), millworker, carpenter, farmer in Mechanic Settlement. His first wife died in childbirth in 1875, leaving him with a young child; he married again in 1876.
MCG29 Saint John Mechanics’ Institute funds. (4 cm) A ledgers
(1875-1897) and (1898-1906) of the Institute, established in Saint John in 1840 to provide technical instruction to workers. Ledgers include
names of lecturers, lecture date; names of employees and salaries; items purchased, expenses (rent, heat, light).
MCG35 Fondes Professeurs du Collège de Bathurst Local Unit (SCFP) #1811 (10 cm). 1972-1975, 1990. Documents re strike at the
college in 1975.
MCG37 Belcher Nursing Home, CPE local #40544, 13 cm (24 p.).
1989-1990. Documents re the Belcher Nursing Home (later the
Mill Cove Nursing Home) Strike and its resolution.

PAULA worked in both the
Private Sector Records Unit
and the Records Management
Unit. She was highly motivated, always professional in dealing with clients and was always looking for ways to make
improvements in the quality of our
services. Paula’s creative imagination
and her artistic talents were invaluable in
her work assignation with the Associates
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and marketing or organizing meetings
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her genuine interest in people and her
willingness to help, qualities she brought
to her interaction with colleagues as well,
were much appreciated.

Selected Recent Acquisitions

Government Records
R514 Albert County Registry Office Records. Bill of Sales Indexes. 2 books; 1877-1891 and 1901-1906. (141) Caron, 2012
R510 Provincial Archives. Provincial Conservation Committee: textile and furniture survey, conservation services to galleries, archives and museums. 1987-2001 (2 cm) R2011.1691
R514 NB Development Corporation. Board Minutes and President’s Reports. 1967-1985 (6 cm) R2011.44
R510 Firehood General. Departmental Audit Reports. 1993-1995 (1.4 cm) R2011.157
R201 National Forest Products Commission. Files on each of the provinces’ marketing boards including minutes. 2002 (2 cm) R2011.152
R512 Cultural Development Board. NB Film memorabilia and newspaper clippings, brochures. 2006-2010 (4 cm) R2011.150
R513 Commission on Excellence in Education. Reports, sub-committees to commission. 1981-1996 (1 cm) R2011.210
R513 Department of Public Safety. Files on the creation of the Department of Solicitor General from the Department of Justice: strategic planning, organization, policies and procedures. 1993-2000 (1 cm) R2011.106

Additions to Archives’ Website
Exhibit “The Diamond Jubilee: A New Brunswick Reflection” containing images of Queen Elizabeth's 2002 visit to New Brunswick was added to "Royal Visits to New Brunswick."
New Brunswick Factory Commission portfolio

FACTORIES ACT, 5 Edward VII, C. 7 (1905). The act defined a factory as "any building, office, or place in which ten or more persons were employed ...in any handicraft or in preparing or manufacturing goods for trade or sale ..." Lobster, fish, and fruit canneries fell outside the act’s purview. RS3-1904-1906-pgf7 • Workroom, Hartt Boot & Shoe Company, Fredericton, ca. 1900. P598-6 • View of Prince William Street, Saint John, ca. 1905. A. Isaacs, cigar manufacturer; Andrew Panley, tailor; and James S. May & Son, tailors, are on the right. P210-795 • Shives lumber mill and wharves, Campbellton, 1899. Mill owner, Kilgour Shives was one of five factory commissioners appointed by Premier Lemuel J. Tweedie’s government in 1904. P13-32 • J. C. Risteen & Co., upper Queen Street at Smythe Street, Fredericton, after 1901. P5-405A • William A. Hickson’s sawmill, one of the largest in the Newcastle area, employed about 85 men in 1905. Hickson and several of his employees gave evidence before the factory commission. P6-477

Portefolio de la commission sur les manufactures au N.-B.