Wet vs. Dry: The Battle for Temperance in Saumarez Parish, Gloucester County

Last fall I was hired at PANB to work on a project creating a finding aid for the papers in RS9; the records of the meetings of the early twentieth century provincial Executive Council (or Cabinet). Description had already been completed up to late 1910, during which time New Brunswick was governed by a Conservative administration (which lasted from 1908 to 1917), then headed by John Douglas Hazen, so I picked up where the work had left off. Despite covering a wide variety of issues, patterns quickly began to emerge. Most of the records, as can be expected, cover routine government business, but a large percentage concern liquor regulation. These can broadly be divided into three categories: the appointment/dismissal of Liquor Licence Inspectors, the awarding/revoking of Liquor Licences, and documents concerning the introduction of prohibition in certain counties and parishes, both for and against. In one instance, in early 1911 a series of documents from Gloucester County reveal just how intense and high stakes the issue of prohibition could be. Hazen was beset by dueling petitions for and against prohibition in the Parish of Saumarez, Gloucester County, and in a series of letters that followed, faced intense political pressure to satisfy the desires of both. Examining these documents can reveal a great deal about how the conflict surrounding prohibition affected the provincial government and how the political process responded to it. Furthermore, the documents seem to reveal strong Acadian Catholic support for the cause of prohibition, something that runs counter to the standard interpretation of it being a largely Anglo-Protestant phenomenon. That the issue of prohibition would cause such a furor is unsurprising. The argument surrounding temperance and prohibition was long-standing in New
Brunswick, with passions high on both sides of the divide. The excessive consumption of alcoholic beverages was widely seen to coincide with a bevy of social ills, and thus in the middle of the nineteenth century an organized and popular movement agitating against the consumption of alcohol emerged. Using arguments couched in the language of public health, self-improvement, Progressive ideology, and Christian moralism these activists encouraged people to give up the drink for the physical and spiritual betterment of themselves and society as a whole. They enjoyed considerable success, the temperance movement was the first large social movement in Canadian history and a sizeable number of Canadians took “the pledge” to abstain from drinking alcohol.

But by the late nineteenth century it was clear to temperance advocates that voluntary abstention had its limitations; if their dream of an alcohol free society was to be realized, they would need state coercion. As a result, they began to clamour for a state enforced prohibition on the manufacture, sale, and consumption of alcoholic beverages. As a result, the debate surrounding the question of alcohol became more divisive than ever and more fraught for politicians. The question was more than a simple matter of wet vs. dry; it brought to bear several important political, economic, and religious debates. Those opposed to prohibition believed that it deprived people of their liberty and imposed the morality of others upon them. Furthermore, there was no guarantee that prohibition would be effective given that the liquor trade and traffic would likely go underground if outlawed. Even the churches were not of one voice on the matter. The evangelical Protestant denominations, suffused in the ideology of the Social Gospel, were fervent champions of prohibition, but this was an ardour their fellow Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches did not share; both favouring voluntary abstention brought about through moral persuasion and education rather than enforcement.

In this atmosphere politicians had to tread carefully so as not to alienate wet or dry voters. It was not only their constituents they had to worry about, as the production and sale of alcohol were major drivers in the economy. Perhaps more pertinent for politicians, alcohol producers and retailers were often major contributors to political parties and campaigns. Furthermore, politicians often peddled in “rum bottle politics,” using booze to entice support at the ballot box. Yet they could not ignore the popularity of prohibition either. Ottawa introduced the Canada Temperance Act in 1878, which allowed for prohibition to be instituted at a municipal level via a plebiscite. Still not satisfied, the prohibition forces pressed on, bringing the issue to a head on September 29, 1898 when the government of Wilfred Laurier held a non-binding national plebiscite on the question of prohibition. 51.3% voted in its favour, although overall turnout was a meager 44%. The thin margin of victory belies the strong majorities prohibition forces garnered in most English majority provinces (including New Brunswick, which saw 72.2% vote in its favour), and indeed can be attributed to the whopping 81.2% vote against it. Using these results as an excuse, the Laurier government left the prohibition question to provincial and municipal governments.

It is here we come back to the documents found in RS9, and an intriguing series of documents from the Council meeting of May 2, 1911 wherein several of the issues swirling around the prohibition debate came to a head in the Parish of Sainte-Marie, Gloucester County. That this area would be the centre of a prohibition debate is interesting. Both county and parish seem to be the least likely places in New Brunswick where prohibition sentiment would take hold. In the 1898 plebiscite only 857 of the county’s 5,375 registered voters bothered to cast a ballot, and of them 477 voted against prohibition to 380 in favour, backing the province wide vote strongly in favour of prohibition. At the parish level the results were even more lopsided, with 129 voting against to 21 in favour. Furthermore, the county and parish were overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, and, if the above results are any indication, the church’s official reticence to promote prohibition had rubbed off on its parish-
Autumn 2015 Number 41

Raymond Young, with thirteen individual ratepayers in the parish, and verifiably parish rate payers, claimed to be 87% of the ratepayer population of the parish is strongly in favour of prohibition, which was also a wet parish, and the sale of liquor. The second petition, dated February 1911, asked the government to take the opposite position, and asking for an Order-in-Council to proceed. Not helping matters were the efforts afoot to petition for prohibition, decided to beat them to the punch by organizing their own. However, again according to Bourgeois, they were not averse to using underhanded tactics, targeting the “rummies,” those that were illiterate, and those that owed the petition’s chief witness, Joseph C. Coughlan, money to sign it; carrying with them cases of gin, rum, and whisky to accentuate their selling point. Bourgeois urged the government to ignore their petition and grant instead the prayer in the “legitimate” prohibition petition. In the opposite corner was A.J.H. Stewart of Bathurst, one of the Hazen government’s advisors for Gloucester County, from which it had no representatives. Writing to Hazen on March 20, Stewart’s opinion could not be further from that of Bourgeois, urging the Hazen government to heed the first petition and not introduce prohibition. Stewart had extensive experience in managing liquor regulation, being a former Chairman of the Liquor Licence Board in the Parish of Shippigan, and argued that enacting prohibition would only make the problem of alcohol traffic and abuse worse. Through strict licencing and regulation in Shippigan, the problem of illegal alcohol trafficking had been brought under control, however the Hazen government’s decision to institute prohibition had undermined all of this. Instead of disappearing, the liquor trade went underground, and now, according to Stewart, “I can go to Shippigan today and get liquor in dozens of places and one can visit that parish today, and… see more drunken men there than you will in Bathurst at any time during the year…” This sad state of affairs had served to further undermine the morals of the parish as the owners of the illegal saloons and taverns often kept “two or three girls,” to satisfy the other urges of their patrons. Due to the “scandalous” results of prohibition in Shippigan, Stewart strongly urged the government to not institute it in Saumarez, except via a local plebiscite. This course of action he deemed a more accurate measure of public opinion, as he believed the petition in favour of prohibition was only so large due to clergymen urging their parishioners to sign it. Stewart also suggested a partisan angle, believing that those pushing for prohibition were Liberals intent on making things difficult for the Conservatives by alienating their local supporters through enacting prohibition.

The Hazen administration seems to have taken Stewart’s advice to heart, moving to allow for the issuing of liquor licences in the parish, a move that did not go down well with the prohibition advocates, and a rapid succession of letters followed the decision. On April 3, Bourgeois wrote an indignant letter to Hazen lambasting them for ignoring the requests of the prohibition petitioners. Aware of Stewart’s arguments, he dismissed them, emphatically denying that Acadian Catholics predominate in Saumarez, even among its Catholic Acadian population, in 1911. Even more intriguingly, they show that such a turnaround in public opinion was a contested and scrutinized matter. Early in 1911 the Hazen government received two petitions coming from the Parish of Saumarez and a lively correspondence emanating from them. Saumarez was a wet parish, and tavern licences were allowed to be issued under the terms of New Brunswick’s Liquor Licence Act of 1896. Those behind the first petition were intent upon keeping it that way. The petition, dated January 17, 1911, was signed by 160 ratepayers from Tracadie and nearby Shelia requesting that the issuing of tavern licences for hotel owners be allowed to continue in the town, parish, and county. The majority of the names are Acadian. The second petition, dated February 1911, asks the government to take the opposite route, claiming that public sentiment in the parish is strongly in favour of prohibition, and asking for an Order-in-Council to prohibit the issuing of liquor licences and the sale of liquor. The second petition is much larger than the first, signed by 546 parish rate payers, claimed to be 82% of the ratepayers in the parish, and verified overall by Justice of the Peace James Raymond Young; with thirteen individual signatures. Like the January petition, Acadian names predominate. As mentioned above, that Acadian Catholics predominate in the standard interpretation of the push for prohibition. Equally surprising is that one of the men who collected signatures for this petition, and who initially mailed it to the government, was one Joseph M. Lévesque, a parish priest from Tracadie! According to the RS9 documents, prohibition may have had more appeal to French Catholics than previously thought.

Soldiers’ Barracks on Queen Street, Fredericton. After 1869 the Barracks was used for Temperance Lodge meetings.

Catholics than previously thought. Having two such diametrically opposed petitions caused a great deal of confusion within the government as to how it should proceed. Not helping matters were the efforts of each block of the petitioners to discredit the other. It seems that the January petition opposed to prohibition was a direct response to the February one in favour of it, if E.J. M. Bourgeois, the manager of a Tracadie based Miramichi Farm Implement Co. Ltd., and advocate for prohibition, is to be believed. Writing to Hazen on February 11, Bourgeois claimed that the tavern owners, upon hearing of the efforts afoot to petition for prohibition, decided to beat them to the punch by organizing their own. However, again according to Bourgeois, they were not averse to using underhanded tactics, targeting the “rummies,” those that were illiterate, and those that owed the petition’s chief witness, Joseph C. Coughlan, money to sign it; carrying with them cases of gin, rum, and whisky to accentuate their selling point. Bourgeois urged the government to ignore their petition and grant instead the prayer in the “legitimate” prohibition petition. In the opposite corner was A.J.H. Stewart of Bathurst, one of the Hazen government’s advisors for Gloucester County, from which it had no representatives. Writing to Hazen on March 20, Stewart’s opinion could not be further from that of Bourgeois, urging the Hazen government to heed the first petition and not introduce prohibition. Stewart had extensive experience in managing liquor regulation, being a former Chairman of the Liquor Licence Board in the Parish of Shippigan, and argued that enacting prohibition would only make the problem of alcohol traffic and abuse worse. Through strict licencing and regulation in Shippigan, the problem of illegal alcohol trafficking had been brought under control, however the Hazen government’s decision to institute prohibition had undermined all of this. Instead of disappearing, the liquor trade went underground, and now, according to Stewart, “I can go to Shippigan today and get liquor in dozens of places and one can visit that parish today, and... see more drunken men there than you will in Bathurst at any time during the year...” This sad state of affairs had served to further undermine the morals of the parish as the owners of the illegal saloons and taverns often kept “two or three girls,” to satisfy the other urges of their patrons. Due to the “scandalous” results of prohibition in Shippigan, Stewart strongly urged the government to not institute it in Saumarez, except via a local plebiscite. This course of action he deemed a more accurate measure of public opinion, as he believed the petition in favour of prohibition was only so large due to clergymen urging their parishioners to sign it. Stewart also suggested a partisan angle, believing that those pushing for prohibition were Liberals intent on making things difficult for the Conservatives by alienating their local supporters through enacting prohibition.

The Hazen administration seems to have taken Stewart’s advice to heart, moving to allow for the issuing of liquor licences
of non-partisanship. Bourgeois concluded his letter by warning Hazen that his petition had the support of 87% of the rate payers, and unless his position was reversed there would be consequences for his government at the ballot box. This warning was echoed by two more Saumarez residents who wrote to Hazen regarding his petition stand. One was James Raymond Young, the Justice of the Peace who verified the prohibition petition, who likewise attested to the petition’s accuracy in measuring the public sentiment of the parish.

During the meeting of May 2, 1911 an Order-in-Council was issued stating the prohibition would rouse the wrath of the temperance concerns of Young; warning that a failure to meet the demands of the petition, or the plebiscite, prohibition would undue all their work and that’s quite something!

However, in other instances the search for an image’s origin involves significantly more digging, and a variety of tools and resources may be involved. The most useful of which is often something called a “reverse image search”, the most comprehensive of which at this time is provided by Google. Reverse image searching allows one to search the internet by images instead of using words or phrases; that is, you upload a photo that you have (or a suitably cropped version thereof) to Google’s reverse image search, and Google attempts to provide you with links to websites featuring the same or similar images. While searching for the origin of an image alleged to be that of Dr. John Vondy for researchers in the U.K., Google’s tool actually raised far more questions than it answered.

The Miramichi-born, London-educated Dr. John Vondy was, by all accounts, a heroic young man who sacrificed his own life in service of over 300 immigrants who were hastily quarantined at Miramichi’s Middle Island. In 1847, when others doctors refused or were nowhere to be found, Vondy volunteered to go to the island where he became overwhelmed with the number of patients sick and dying with a number of diseases including typhus, which Vondy soon contracted and it caused his death. Vondy’s interesting and tragic story has led to his memorialization in history books and elsewhere, and in short order, two different low quality images of a similar looking man, both alleged to be “the” Dr. John Vondy popped up through some quick Googling.
Initially, I was delighted to be able to send links to these two images to the British researchers but not without some nagging doubt. Was it plausible that this young man would have had the opportunity or taken the time and expense to have not one, but two photographs produced of himself, but what of the left-hand one? It just didn’t look like any kind of daguerreotype to my eyes. The left-hand image certainly didn’t look of photography that existed during and only stable, reliable, and popular method then Miramichi. Further, I knew that the province (he worked in Woodstock and province (he worked in Woodstock and therefore, perhaps New Brunswick’s) first daguerreotype studio was established quite early, in May 1842 by Clephon J. Clow (Harper 1955-261). For comparison, however, the first Fredericton daguerreotypist may not have been in operation until as late as 1846 (Harper 1955-264). It is easy to grossly underestimate the extent to which 1840s New Brunswick was “plugged in” to the rest of the world. So, it turns out it that it is at least possible that Vondy had one or even two images produced of himself, but what of the left-hand one? It just didn’t look like a daguerreotype.

Daguerreotypes were invented in 1839 in France by Louis Daguerre, and their popularity spread quickly; Saint John’s (and therefore, perhaps New Brunswick’s) first daguerreotype studio was established quite early, in May 1842 by Clephon J. Clow (Harper 1955-261). For comparison, however, the first Fredericton daguerreotypist may not have been in operation until as late as 1846 (Harper 1955-264). It is easy to grossly underestimate the extent to which 1840s New Brunswick was “plugged in” to the rest of the world. So, it turns out it that it is at least possible that Vondy had one or even two images produced of himself, but what of the left-hand one? It just didn’t look like a daguerreotype.

After performing some Google reverse image searches, one search turned up the Miramichi Irish Historical Park’s website. This website, it turns out, actually included an uncorrected version of the left-hand “Vondy” image which revealed a photographer’s trademark at the bottom: “William Noman – Montreal Toronto [illegible]” (although nearly illegible in the scan, the third city is almost definitely “Halifax” based on comparison with other similar Notman photos). Finally, the plot continued to thicken when an authority on photographic processes, Luis Nadeau (owner of photoconservation. com), informed me that he believed that this image was, in fact, a copy and not necessarily an original image taken by William Notman. Studios very frequently would offer “copying services”, and some did a great deal of business making prints from older daguerreotypes (or other types of photos). In other words, then, even though this image probably wasn’t produced any earlier than 1866, it could yet have been a later reproduction of an original daguerreotype made during Vondy’s lifetime. Nadeau’s opinion was seconded by a Nora Hague, senior catalogue, Notman Photographic Archives, McCord Museum (which houses the largest collection of Notman photos); Hague agreed that the alleged Vondy image by Notman was almost definitely a copy. However, Hague and Nadeau disagreed on the format of the original from which the Notman copy was made. In short, while Hague suggested that it may have been a copy from a paper print that was a copy of a daguerreotype, Nadeau believed this image to be a 2nd or even 3rd generation copy of a paper original. I also consulted Greg Hill, Senior Conservator, Archival Materials and Photographs at the Canadian Conservation Institute who suggested that the Notman images “don’t really look like copies of daguerreotypes” to him. All three authorities consulted, however, stressed the difficulty in assessing the images due to their low quality (resolution). Establishing the original format definitively is crucial in this case, remember, because ruling out daguerreotypes as an original source for the Notman image would effectively push the date of that original past 1847 (when various paper print processes gained popularity in the following decades).

With my attempts at dating and ultimately identifying this image via analyzing photographic processes having arguably hit a bit of an impasse, I turned to a different method: asking a fellow archivist who studied historical clothing and styles. Heather Aiton Landry of the Trent Valley Archives in Ontario gave an estimated date range of 1853–1857, and provided the following rationale: “he is a young man, whoever he is, which puts him on the trendier side of things, so I’m leaning toward the early side of my estimate. It’s the transitional cravat/necktie that dates it, and the hair, which would have been curlier in the early 1840s and more brushed forward”. This bit of evidence again pushes the scale somewhat towards the direction of these images possibly being of the real Dr. John Vondy, but the estimated dates certainly leave plenty of room for the images to have been taken after Vondy’s death. Aiton Landry added, too, that she couldn’t imagine the photo “dating from before his arrival in Woodstock [where he worked for 3–4 years beginning circa 1843], at least based on the hair and the cravat”.

Even based on this new evidence, then, the possibility still remained that both images could be of the Dr. John Vondy. For the time being, however, only three deductions can be made about the provenance of the above left-hand image:

1. That it is a copy.
2. That it is very likely a copy of a paper original (making it unlikely that the real Dr. John Vondy is the actual subject).
3. And that, despite #2, there remains a small but real possibility that both images, including the mysterious left-hand one, were ultimately produced from daguerreotype originals.

This mystery has not yet reached a conclusion that would be satisfying to many. However, the process of attempting to unravel such a surprisingly complex tale that began with two low-quality images found on a Google search, has itself been rewarding and informative for me, and hopefully for readers as well. Drawing on expertise from around the country, I was afforded an opportunity to learn more about the history of various photographic formats, methods of reproduction, photographic technologies, dating methods, and about the introduction and popularity of daguerreotypes in Victorian New Brunswick. This quest has taken many turns and may someday even result in a definitive answer, but along the way several techniques and pieces of information were gleaned that will be useful going forward in solving other photograph identification puzzles.
Selected Recent Acquisitions

Private Records

MC3933 Ann Lowe Historic Homes Collection. This fonds contains group reports written by University of New Brunswick Fredericton students for Professor Ann Lowe’s class EDVO 2742: Housing and Interior Design. Each of the reports concentrates on a different historic home in the Fredericton, New Brunswick area. Reports include general histories of Fredericton, histories of the homes and brief biographies of the people who inhabited them, floor plans, and architectural details. Records include transparencies, photocopies of photographs, drawings, and maps; also includes 393 slides and 24 photographs. 1976, 1989–1995. (15cm textual)

MC3945 Fred L. Howard fonds: [15 September 1915-20 May 1916]. This fonds consists of a single item, the digital (scanned) World War I diary (September 1915–May 1916) of Frederick Leonard Howard, of St. Martins, N.B. He records his daily activities at the Western Front (Belgium and France): sentry and guard duty; building dugouts, barricades, gun pits, and trenches; laying cable; and carrying rations, cement, and barbed wire. He also describes living conditions: sleeping in barns, fields, old houses, schoolhouses, tents, lean-tos, and straw shacks; battling lice; listening to the sound of heavy gunfire; and enduring mud in the trenches. 1915–1916. Digital files.

MC3952 Ken MacLauchlan fonds. This fonds documents the wartime activities of Kenneth Earle MacLauchlan, of Woodstock, beginning in November 1939, when he boarded the Duchess of York, destined for England and his service with the Carleton and York Regiment, during World War II. It includes dozens of letters written by Ken MacLauchlan to his wife, Laura Adelaide (Spence) MacLauchlan, which detail his activities as an officer in the Canadian Army, as well as his interactions with officers, enlisted men, and residents of English and Scottish villages and towns, in which he was billeted or in which he was camped / stationed with the Army, as well as his social activities and his travels to visit tourist sights, museums, churches, and other places of interest. 1918, [1939–1982]. (30 cm textual)

MC3952 John Flynn collection. Excel spreadsheet database index to vital stats and other identifying information printed in the Kings County Record from the 1890s to 1930s, approximately 11,620 entries. 2012. Digital file.

MC3956 Hiram Alfred Cody fonds. Textual records related to Cody, an Anglican priest and archdeacon of Saint John, including brief essays and addresses written and delivered at various events by Cody between 1925 and 1939. There are two programs for The Fortnightly Club, which was a literary group active in Saint John at the time, as well as a flyer advertising Cody’s book “If Any Man Sin” (1915). 1915 – 1939 (5cm textual)

MC3957 Carolyn Atkinson collection of Richard B. Hatfield records. Carolyn Atkinson was the Executive Secretary for Premier Richard B. Hatfield. These textual and photographic records were collected by Atkinson during the course of her employment under Hatfield. 1970–1987. (70cm)

Government Records

RS19 Credit Unions and Co-operatives Administration Records. Annual Reports, 1975–1980. (.1m)

RS33 Court of Queens Bench: Judges Note Books. 1 notebook, 1917–1918. (.01m)

RS58 Records Of The Court Of Divorce. 1999. (15.6m)

RS100 Legislative Services Records. Orders In Council - Original filed Regulations (NB REGS), 2007–2008. (.6m)


RS746 Moncton Judicial District Probate Court Records. 1999, 2000. (1.2m)


RS1059 Department of Natural Resources Maps and Plans. 20 maps (mostly cadastral maps) of the Kedgwick/St. Quentin area showing cuts for the New Brunswick International Paper Co. and Fraser Co. Ltd., approx. 1920–1968.
