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Idyll and Industry: Rethinking the Environmental History of Grand Pré, Nova Scotia

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Abstract

In June 2012, UNESCO named the landscape of Grand Pré, Nova Scotia, a World Heritage Site, as 'exceptional testimony to a traditional farming settlement created in the seventeenth century by the Acadians in a coastal zone with tides that are among the highest in the world'. Grand Pré is the gateway to the Annapolis Valley, a rare stretch of favourable soils and climate in a largely unarable province. From the early nineteenth century onward, ambitions to make the Valley 'the Orchard of the Empire' resulted in some of the most intensive rural development in Atlantic Canada. This transformed the physical, ecological and economic landscape of Nova Scotia profoundly, and became central to its sense of place in the global community. Its fields and orchards also inspired a second industry: tourism, promoting, ironically, a decidedly *non*-industrial picture of blithe fertility and prosperity. In recent decades, both agriculture and tourism in the region have created a new idyll, one that grafts the language of sustainability onto the pastoral image of apple blossoms, and so successfully draws attention away from the ecological costs and economic health of agriculture in the region. With its focus on pre-industrial Acadian settlement, historical commemoration at Grand Pré has the very real effect of affirming the possibility of local and sustainable agriculture in the area today. But the *pré* is also part of another history, another set of agricultural practices that followed the Acadians and that still frame most agricultural production in Nova Scotia. This essay offers a second public narrative for Grand Pré, one that treats the site as part of the Annapolis Valley as well as *l'ancienne Acadie*, part of an industrial landscape as well

as an idyllic one. It is only by recognizing both histories that we can really appreciate the realities of modern agriculture and the need for sustainable alternatives.

Introduction

In June 2012, UNESCO named the landscape of Grand Pré, Nova Scotia, a World Heritage Site, as 'exceptional testimony to a traditional farming settlement created in the seventeenth century by the Acadians in a coastal zone with tides that are among the highest in the world.' Using dykes and wooden sluices (*aboiteaux*), the Acadians reclaimed salt marshes along the Minas Basin in the Bay of Fundy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to produce nutrient-rich farmland (*pré*, or meadow) that is still drained and farmed today. To UNESCO, then, Grand Pré's universal heritage is primarily an artefact of early European coastal land management and a living tradition of agricultural practice, as well as a memorial to the Acadian deportation (*le grand dérangement*) by the British before the Seven Years' War. The same is true of its designation as a national historic site and Canada's first rural national historic district.[1]

By drawing a direct lineage between the *pré*'s creation and current practice, between Acadian settlers and 'their modern successors', the UNESCO designation permits and even encourages us to vault over the intervening era of industrial agriculture. There are certainly interesting continuities between the period of Acadian settlement and today, from the complementary use of uplands and dykelands to the collective management of the *pré* by a community-run marsh body. But this stewardship narrative, linking Acadian and modern farming, also perpetuates a rural idyll, an image of the region that has migrated easily from older preferences for romantic nostalgia to the newer language of environmental and community sustainability. While this suits the interests of both Acadian cultural nationalism and provincial tourism, it excises a kind of land use that bears far more directly on land use today and which formed the basis of Nova Scotia's economy and international image for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Global values in local history: why study Grand Pré?

Grand Pré sits at the northern entrance of the Annapolis Valley, a stretch of flat land about 130 kilometres long, between the North and

South Mountains (in a relative use of the term, since the 'mountains' are well under 300 metres high – but still high enough to be significant in the low-lying Maritime provinces). In a province with only 8 per cent land in agriculture, the silted shores of the Minas Basin and the sheltered microclimate of the Annapolis Valley have been especially valuable, making it the area of the most abundant and diverse agricultural production in Nova Scotia. Kings County – which encompasses the eastern half of the Annapolis Valley – has the most agriculturally based economy in Nova Scotia, in 2001 accounting for 30 per cent of the province's agriculture and 2.5 times the national average per capita.[2]

If the *pré* proper is the result of seventeenth-century dyking, its agricultural geography – like the rest of the Annapolis Valley – is at least as much, and much more directly, the result of *nineteenth*-century ideas about agriculture, the environment and the state. This essay proposes a second narrative for Grand Pré, one that places environmental history at the centre by treating the site as part of the Annapolis Valley as well as *l'Acadie*, and by recognizing the continuity of the industrial past and *its* lessons for sustainable practice as well as the continuity of dykeland farming. The challenge is to recognize the importance and the rarity (if not the uniqueness) of the *pré* as a seventeenth-century artefact operating in twenty-first-century time, while showing how it has been affected by *subsequent* decisions and historical patterns. To integrate these two strands is to present to the public a more complete (and a more truthful) history, a more expansive geography and a more constructive understanding of Nova Scotia's environmental past.

Grand Pré reminds us that what may appear to be a local history is in fact profoundly transnational. The site is the product of a migration of peoples and ideas about coastal settlement and agriculture, a migration that defined the early modern Atlantic world. Imperial conflicts of the eighteenth century gave way to global exchanges of the nineteenth; in both cases, land was an invaluable commodity, whether for enhancing state power, promoting agricultural settlement as a mark of social stability and prosperity, or satisfying new consumer preferences. Here those preferences were both material (agricultural products) and cultural (tourism). Grand Pré demonstrates how a place's cultural identity can be scripted externally yet prove indelible from, and inexpendable to, the place in the long term. From its relationship with a famous poem to its designation as a World Heritage Site (and thus as having 'universal value'), the place is granted meaning from afar. So this wider view also asks us to consider the value and freight of historic designation. More than a castle or a cathedral, a working agricultural

landscape cannot be isolated from its surrounding environment – indeed, historically, it would not have been.

It is at this intersection of representation and use – of idyll and industry – that we find the central themes of this essay. Regeneration must include ecological as well as socioeconomic and cultural sustainability. The growing popularity of organic and locavore food movements calls us to look more closely at their evolution, the industrial practices to which they are such a deliberate response and their claim of *terroir*. The term *terroir* suggests a respect for both regional heritage and environmental particularity, and the World Heritage list contains many agricultural landscapes that celebrate and preserve traditional practices. Other agricultural districts in northwestern Europe and the northeastern United States have likewise 'cultivated' an image of a pastoral existence that has diverged intentionally from large-scale, scientifically managed production.[3] Grand Pré has emerged as a locus for sustainable agriculture in Canada in recent years in a form of regeneration that is succeeding *because* it aligns with a recognizable heritage: in this case, centuries-old dykeland farming. But Grand Pré demonstrates how a place can be made iconic as an idyll, that is, as non-industrial, even as it participated in a global industrial economy. In this sense its cultural identity is more selective than its ecological heritage, a selectivity that rather problematically excuses the area from a history of more harmful practices. This story thus asks us to consider, again, a wider and more complicated historical context, one that adds succession to the themes of regeneration, heritage and cultural identity.

Historic sites and environmental history

In their article '"54, 40 or Fight": Writing Within and Across Borders in North American Environmental History', Wynn and Evenden write that '… there have been few efforts to situate canonical events and problems in Canadian history within an environmental context. What do environmental historians have to say about the building of the railroad, the growth of the welfare state or Quebec nationalism?'[4] Their examples reflect the modern, and westward, emphasis of most work in Canadian history, but the same could be asked of the explorations of the North Atlantic by the Norse in the tenth century – or more to the point, the *grand dérangement* of 1755. The two solitudes of national narrative and environmental change extend to, and are embodied in, the designation of protected places, divided as they are between nature

and history, between national parks and historic sites, and between 'natural' and 'cultural' World Heritage Sites. Since at least the 1970s we have acknowledged the human imprint in national parks, as 'cultural landscapes', but the inverse is not true at historic sites, which are generally tied to or responsible for representing a particular chapter in the national narrative. As such, they feature an older idea of heroic human enterprise (what Parks Canada calls 'human creativity') with the land as backdrop or raw material, transformed as part and evidence of the nation-building project.

Yet the ecological turn in organizations such as Parks Canada, which is responsible for both national parks and national historic sites, should prompt us to rethink our approach to public history as much as to park policy. These sites are ideal places to discuss the environmental context – and environmental impact – of human actions. The remarkable number of cultural World Heritage Sites in Atlantic Canada (L'Anse aux Meadows, Lunenburg and Grand Pré, and Red Bay) incorporate an equally remarkable number of issues in environmental history, whether in the politics of environmental management (marine and terrestrial, protection of viewscape, jurisdictional conflict, local/historical uses and preservation) or the efficacy of interpretation (presenting scientific, bio-archaeological and historical research; conveying successful occupations, and the disjuncture between present and past geographies).

With a century of commemorative, tourist and archaeological activity at the site, Grand Pré is well known in the history of Nova Scotia. Maritime historians have concentrated on either its position within *Acadie*, or its construction as a site of romantic pastoralism with a quintessential 'folk' to draw the tourist gaze.[5] But its environmental history can draw from work in other disciplines, notably a long tradition of historical geography and recent archaeology focused on the Acadians' salt-marsh farming, a subject also pursued by historians of the early modern Atlantic world.[6] Research on the history of Nova Scotia agriculture (including apples, the province's most iconic product) acknowledges the effect of climate and soil, but has concentrated on economic output rather than environmental circumstance or impact. I suspect this is because of the so-called Acadiensis School's preoccupation with the political economy of regionalism and the disadvantages of Canadian Confederation to the Atlantic region, and the longstanding – if not central – debate among Maritime historians (and politicians) as to whether Nova Scotia was made poorer or richer by Confederation with Canada.[7] Nature has always been present, but in the background

or in neighbouring disciplines. We have yet to script a history of environmental change at Grand Pré.

'The Fruitful Valley': Grand Pré in the Annapolis Valley

> In the Acadian land, on the shores of the Basin of Minas,
> Distant, secluded, still, the little village of Grand-Pré
> Lay in the fruitful valley. Vast meadows stretched to the eastward,
> Giving the village its name, and pasture to flocks without number.
> Dikes, that the hands of the farmers had raised with labour incessant,
> Shut out the turbulent tides; but at stated seasons the flood-gates
> Opened, and welcomed the sea to wander at will o'er the meadows.
> West and south there were fields of flax, and orchards and cornfields
> Spreading afar and unfenced o'er the plain . . .[8]

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was not a salt-marsh biologist, nor did he ever actually visit 'the shores of the Basin of Minas', but his famous 1847 poem *Evangeline* got the basics of Acadian coastal agriculture more or less correct. (I say this with two rather substantial qualifiers: the opening line of the poem announces 'This is the forest primeval', hardly a precise description of the Fundy marshlands; and, of course, the storyline itself is entirely fictitious.) The *pré* was created when, beginning about 1680, Acadian settlers drained the salt marshes between the mainland, Long Island and Boot Island to create a roughly circular area of farmland now measuring about 1,300 hectares.

Anchored by marsh hay and cordgrass, fed by the silt of the Fundy tides and the wide, slow-moving Cornwallis and Gaspereau Rivers and sheltered from Atlantic weather by the uplands to the southeast, the area (see Figure 1) boasted all the advantages that are lacking in much of the rest of Nova Scotia, with its Atlantic exposure and slate bedrock.[9] Indeed, some scholars have suggested that the Edenic description of the New World and the references to fruit in the tenth-century Icelandic sagas in fact point to a location in southern Nova Scotia for the fabled Norse settlement of Vinland.[10]

The largest Acadian settlements (Grand Pré, Beaubassin, Port Royal) lined the eastern Fundy shore with farmland and pasture. The British eyed these rich farmlands even before the French surrendered mainland Nova Scotia in 1713, but especially after the founding of Halifax in 1749. Situated on a world-class harbour, but on a decidedly

Figure 1 Canada, Surveys and Mapping Branch, Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, National Topographic Survey: Wolfville, Nova Scotia (1928), detail.

unarable peninsula of slate and granite, the new capital required settlements of supply. Anxious about their hold on the former (and still) Francophone *Acadie* – and, increasingly, the rest of America – the British encouraged a series of immigrations to the Annapolis Valley, first by so-called Planters from New England in the 1760s and then by Loyalists after the Revolutionary War. (At the head of the Bay of Fundy, on what is now the border of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, the British also invited settlers from Yorkshire – people with experience in drainage farming.[11]) These transplanted Americans – advantaged by both the good conditions and the 'wind fall of Acadian lands and cattle' – adopted the complementary use of uplands and marsh, of woodlots and residences on the uplands and agriculture and pasture on the *pré*, with a similar profile of mixed farming with a heavy emphasis on livestock. Unlike the Acadians, though, they enjoyed a certain amount of state support, established an Anglo-American system of land division and town planning that persists to this day, and could count on emerging colonial markets for their produce.[12] Such was the rationale for building the Shubenacadie Canal – the longest in Maritime Canada – proposed as early as the 1790s and begun in the 1820s to supply

Halifax with the produce of 'our finest, best cultivated, and wealthiest agricultural districts'.[13]

As in most places, then, succession is a fundamental and crucial part of the environmental history of Grand Pré. If the *pré* worked by today's farmers is the product of Acadian expertise and labour, the cultural, political and technological landscapes they inhabit are generally the result of nineteenth-century Anglo-American ideas and practices. Consider the societal and moral standing bestowed by British, Americans and Canadians alike on agriculture as the key to both self-sufficiency and social stability. Little wonder that colonial and subsequently Canadian authorities would represent it as the preferred form of land use.[14] Accepting his nomination to represent Hants County in the colonial assembly in 1863, William D. Lawrence proclaimed:

> I am more in favour of agriculture than any other [industry], the first great employment of man – the noblest employment of man – agriculture, which takes one from his fireside, into the fields where with the plough he turns the soil to the face of heaven, and casts the seed on with his hands, and waits with patience to a kind providence for the reward of his labour.[15]

That Lawrence was a ship-owner and shipbuilder, in a colony at the peak of its merchant trade and shipbuilding industries, speaks volumes about how much weight voters placed on the social importance of farming. Historians ascribed similar qualities to the Planters, praising their 'love of the soil, sobriety, industry, and thrift' in 'planting well'.[16] This was also institutionalized in the provincial museum system. In 1971, the Nova Scotia government acquired Acacia Grove (built 1814–6), the stately Georgian home of Charles Prescott, located at Starr's Point across the Cornwallis River from Grand Pré. Prescott was a shipping merchant from Halifax who moved to the Valley to take up a new career as a scientifically minded gentleman farmer. While he experimented with hundreds of fruit species, Prescott is known primarily for introducing some key commercial apple types, notably the Gravenstein, which became the province's signature product. Thus Prescott House publically links an architecture of wealth and individual success (admittedly a common feature of local museums) to the new landscape of orchards and 'the development of the apple industry and its role in the local and provincial economy from the 19th century into the modern period'.[17]

By the middle part of the century, the orchards at Starr's Point had become the international image of the colony. When Nova Scotia apples won medals at the Royal Horticultural Society's International Fruit and Vegetable Show in 1862, it elevated the colony's profile within the empire and affirmed the prestige of the agricultural sector. Botanical display and exchange was fundamental not only to the imperial project but to Nova Scotia's view of its place within that empire, given the global traffic of its fleet. (This also fuelled much of the colony's opposition to Confederation with the Canadas in the 1860s: with the ties to empire visible daily in her ports, it seemed unnecessary if not counterintuitive to 'turn their backs upon England and fix their thoughts upon Ottawa'[18]). Nova Scotia would dine out on its standing as the 'Orchard of the Empire' for the next 80 years, enjoying the symbolic, political and economic currency of its special relationship with, especially, British markets.[19] While her sea captains brought home plants as biological trophies, Nova Scotia was itself reshaped to export its own plants, to compete actively (and successfully) with other agricultural producers around the world. Although the Shubenacadie Canal was operating by 1856, much more significant, especially for transporting perishables, was the network of railways already dominating the political and industrial landscape of British North America. Numerous lines – replete with new warehouses for produce storage – connected the Annapolis Valley to ocean ports such as Halifax and inland hubs like Truro.[20]

After Confederation in 1867, Nova Scotia found itself drawn into a second new network: a national programme of agricultural science. In 1886, the new federal Department of Agriculture established half a dozen Dominion Experimental Farms across the country, including one at Nappan, at the head of the Bay of Fundy. The Experimental Farms were designed to test and distribute crops that would fare best in different regional ecosystems; they thus encouraged specialization and concentration, whether Marquis wheat on the prairie or particular apple varieties in the Annapolis Valley. (The permanent effect is brought home in the popular memoir/manifesto *The 100 Mile Diet: A Year of Local Eating*, when the authors realize that the handful of apple varieties found in a grocery store are a mere fraction of the dozens that once were grown in British Columbia: a diversity now utterly forgotten.)[21] The province was equally invested in cultivating expertise: a School of Agriculture was established at the Provincial Normal School in Truro in 1885, and a School of Horticulture at Wolfville in 1905. Significantly, if unsurprisingly, there was also a vibrant culture of what Parks Canada now calls 'citizen science' at the local level. In January

1910, for example, the Berwick *Register* reported that the farmers' meeting ('well attended, and proved very interesting') heard a series of reports ('at length and most instructively') on methods of packing and grading, new forms of disease, fertilization and transport and reception in London.[22] That year, at the urging of the Nova Scotia Fruit Growers Association, Ottawa agreed to establish an Experimental Fruit Station at Kentville. Now known as the Atlantic Food and Horticulture Research Centre, the Kentville station remains a dominant presence in Valley agriculture: responsible for adapting the Honeycrisp apple, developing the L'Acadie blanc grape and gamely hosting the annual Kentville Pumpkin Festival.[23]

Indeed, tourism has been intertwined with farming in the Valley since the late nineteenth century. The same railway networks that helped industrialize agricultural production promised tourists from New England a romantic, arcadian landscape of prosperous farms wreathed in blossom. The Windsor and Annapolis Railway opened its line to Grand Pré in 1869; the Dominion Atlantic Railway purchased the site in 1917 and landscaped it (complete with a statue of the fictional Evangeline) as an ornamental flower garden visibly distinct from the working fields around.[24] Selling the Land of Evangeline meant selling the *land* as much as the Evangeline. Ambling by motorcar in 1923, Charles Towne grew impatient with:

> a certain lithograph which had greeted us from almost every inn at which we stopped, showing Longfellow's heroine standing in the midst of a radiant orchard . . . I was weary of the vicarious glimpses of apple-trees, and I knew that if we didn't find them soon in their bright abundance we should feel cheated.[25]

Travelogues paused for a moment of hushed regret for the poor, departed Acadians, but then resumed their rhapsodic descriptions of 'seas of bloom', and their praise for the rich soils and evident prosperity of the Valley.[26] 'Of Grand Pré it has been said it boasts a three-fold attraction: beauty, fertility, and sentiment,' explained the Canadian Pacific Railway.[27] 'No wonder the Acadians were blithe,' one 1894 tour book mused, 'this must have been a veritable land of plenty.'[28] And clearly, it still was: 'Acadie, home of the happy', then and now.[29]

The promotion of the region as a site of beauty, fertility and sentimental views of agriculture persisted throughout the twentieth century. Valley farmers launched the Apple Blossom Festival in 1933 to promote their exports and import the tourists. (Recognizing, as others

had done with Evangeline, the allure of the apple blossom as a picture of feminine innocence, the festival annually crowns a Queen Anapolisa from among the Apple Princesses representing the Valley communities; the first Queen was crowned at the Kentville research station, thereby uniting ceremony with practical interest.) Soon after, the province themed 'scenic travelways' to promote different micro-regions, with the blossom-ridden Evangeline Route – perhaps not coincidentally, provincial Highway 1 – a calming counterpart to the 'coastal sublime' of the Cabot Trail on Cape Breton; the regions, and their matching highways, remain the backbone of provincial tourism today.[30] Stan Rogers sang the lament of the expatriate recalling the view of the Bay of Fundy and the apple orchards of the Annapolis Valley from Gaspereau Mountain, above Grand Pré.[31]

Even Parks Canada is now cultivating an apple orchard on the historic site next to the church. Now the agriculture-themed celebrations aimed at urbanites from Halifax (or Ontario) fill half a calendar year: the Apple Blossom Festival in early June; Tastes of the Valley and Meet Your Farmer days in harvest season along with county and provincial exhibitions; a month-long wine festival in September and the Pumpkin Festival in October. (Windsor, Nova Scotia, is home to the Hants County Exhibition, the oldest agricultural fair in Canada, and to Howard Dill, who gained international recognition for his breed of 'Atlantic Giant' pumpkins.) Farmers from the Valley also maintain a year-round presence in Halifax, through community-supported agriculture subscriptions, farmers' markets and a new group of locally supplied grocers.

The current marketing of Grand Pré as a model of sustainable agriculture is thus both new and familiar. The image is still one of aesthetically pleasing, small-scale farming, still pinned to the dykeland, but adopting the newer language of sustainability and *terroir*. Wineries, in particular, have proliferated in the Gaspereau area since the 1990s. There are now nine in the area, with two more at the far end of the Annapolis Valley, touting distinct grape varieties and vineyard practices geared to the coastal soils and climate, and attempting to gain an international reputation, in language that recalls that of apple producers a century earlier. 'Tidal Bay brilliantly reflects its birthplace: the terroir, coastal breezes, cooler climate and our winemakers' world-class craftsmanship,' proclaims Domaine de Grand Pré, housed in an 1826 farmhouse.[32] Even non-agricultural products made elsewhere in Nova Scotia trade on the Valley imprint of 'lush fields and orchards … and the harmony man shares with nature'.[33] These messages of

local adaptation, regional character, food security and environmental empathy are then wrapped in the final sanction of Acadian precedent as 'people who nearly perfected the art of land cultivation and sustainable agriculture'.[34]

The environmental politics of commemoration

This association has been actively encouraged by the commemorative language used to designate and promote Grand Pré as a historic site. It has served as a *lieu de memoire* for the Acadian community since at least the 1880s, but in the early 1980s the older emphasis on the Deportation and the Seven Years' War gave way to language that celebrates Acadian settlement before 1755 and the emotional 'attachment [that] remains to this day among Acadians throughout the world to this area, the heart of their ancestral homeland and symbol of the ties which unite them'.[35] The dykeland, a substantial example of coastal engineering, is framed as a national achievement. With the Acadian community deeply invested in the management of the site (Grand Pré is jointly managed by Parks Canada and the *Société Promotion Grand-Pré*), with Parks Canada identifying 'cultural communities' as a strategic priority in national historic commemoration, and with the move away from the two-nations narrative in Canadian historiography, this is not surprising.[36] But neither is it surprising that the effect – as seen in paintings and murals commissioned for the site – is to show *l'ancienne Acadie* as a 'quasi-paradise' in perennial harvest, with 'wonderful weather, abundant agricultural productivity, and a happy and carefree existence'.[37]

The new emphases on the Acadian community and on landscape in site commemoration also reinforce a direct relationship between the Acadian past and current practice. Its designation as a national rural heritage district cited 'the blending of natural and built features, *in the retention and development of land use patterns originating with the Acadians*, particularly in the spatial distribution of arable land, orchards, dykelands, and residential hamlets'[38] (emphasis added). The designations also draw a direct line between pre-industrial and contemporary dykeland management, between the collective effort of the Acadian settlers and the marsh bodies of today. Presenting Acadian land-use patterns as effective in their permanence and sustainable in their footprint is understandable given Parks Canada Agency's investment in presenting itself as an agent of ecological integrity and 'citizen science'.

Likewise, it makes political sense for the Acadian community to link their historic claim to the area with good environmental stewardship.

That said, this raises three problems – one past, two present. For one, it perpetuates the Golden-Age characterization of *l'Acadie*. As Wynn has argued, we can credit the Acadians with knowledgeable affection and respect for the Fundy marshlands. But European colonization was fuelled by a confidence in human mastery of nature, and the Acadians, like most settlers, had a pragmatic, functional view of the land and its potential yield:

> Much as we may wish to see them as such, neither the early indigenous peoples of the region nor pre-expulsion Acadians can properly be counted as proto-environmentalists. We can allow them concern about the lives and livelihoods, the well-being, of their children, and even their children's children, but there is no evidence that they appreciated the biophysical limits of their settings or what we would now call ecological linkages in anything other than purely local and practical ways … we should not mistake these images as evidence of deliberately forward-looking, ecologically aware, sustainable practice.[39]

Meanwhile, the alluring image of farms in harmony with nature serves only to increase external pressures on the area – much like it did in the railway age, but now encouraged further by a feel-good stamp of sustainability. The Annapolis Valley is the most important liaison between the urban and rural in Nova Scotia, and Grand Pré is both the gateway to, and face of, that connection. The mutual dependency of the Atlantic and Fundy shores has existed since the eighteenth century, but the current twinning of Highway 1 makes 'our finest, best cultivated, and wealthiest agricultural districts' even more accessible. And it is worth noting that one of the main rationales for rebuilding and maintaining the dykes in the mid-twentieth century was to support the highways now so essential to both agriculture and tourism.

But in this relationship, the *pré*'s collectivist, non-industrial face is its fortune. Accordingly, there is no mention of the active, if not more problematic, history that was required to create this landscape, whether biological (species introduction and concentration), chemical (sprays and fertilizers) or material (the physical infrastructure of production and transport). Nor is there public discussion of the economic health of the agricultural sector: for example, the postwar loss of international markets and a lack of federal support leaving the industry – like

much of the region – in 'a dependent and underdeveloped state'; the growth of multinational agribusiness, farm consolidation and rural out-migration.[40] But the new interest in sustainability *has* necessarily affected the campaign for designation, with a growing recognition of the ecological pressures on the *pré* at least. These include a preponderance of non-native species, rising sea levels and tidal pressure on the dykelands, and other land-use development proposals in the area. The 2011 landscape management plan goes further, stating first that conservation of the property requires a working agricultural economy and, second, that the problems facing the farmers on the dykelands 'are not unique to Grand Pré'.[41] This is perhaps the frankest acknowledgement that the *pré* cannot be seen as separate from the larger economic and ecological life of the Valley.

Of course, the idealized, singular periodization we see at Grand Pré appears at historic sites across Atlantic Canada. The public image of Prince Edward Island (PEI) is also *its* rural golden age, in the latter nineteenth century, when the Island was one of the most agriculturally productive districts in Atlantic Canada. The island idyll, in television, tourism and Cavendish National Historic Site (home of 'Green Gables' of *Anne of Green Gables* fame), presents an era when thousands of small farms embodied the social coherence and stewarding sensibility of the family farm and the economic sustainability of mixed farming.[42] Back in Nova Scotia, Lunenburg does the same with the Grand Banks fishery of the same period, as a kind of proto-industrial, community-knit enterprise of low-impact technologies and sustainable abundance reflected in the prosperity of the high Victorian streetscape.[43] The heroics of daring sea captains and the romance of the 'saga of the sea' are untroubled with any reference to the groundfish moratorium, let alone the larger history of resource harvesting in the north Atlantic or the sociopolitical debates surrounding the fishery today.[44] While public history generally requires both a positive story and a clear-cut message, environmental history tends to muddy those waters.

This comes back to the value of Grand Pré's history – if taken altogether. As a model for small-scale, local and low-impact farming, it has the very real effect of affirming the art of the possible, of humanizing and cultivating support for sustainable agriculture. But it is not a straight line between the seventeenth century and today. It needs to be understood in *relational* terms: the Acadian past in relation to what came after, Grand Pré in relation to the rest of the Annapolis Valley and the province, and today's dykelands in relation to industry norms. The idyll is most useful, in other words, when contrasted with

what followed – when it is shown as an alternative to mainstream agricultural practices. But that means we must discuss those mainstream practices, a reality in which Grand Pré also exists. When we featured it as a case study in the Environment, Sustainability and Society Program at Dalhousie University, even my Nova Scotian students (who have been taught Acadian history since elementary school) want to see it as evidence of a once and future moment of sustainable agriculture, a wooden-shoed carbon footprint for the modern age. This is not surprising given the commemorative language at the site and the public image of (and desires for) Valley agriculture. But the site actually works better for teaching about succession and palimpsest. Even with the concrete artefact of the *pré*, a strong Acadian voice and sense of history in the community and a growing interest in sustainable practices among Valley farmers, most of the frameworks from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries for industrial agriculture remain in place, frameworks of science, technique, infrastructure and identity. Until we incorporate this second story, we will continue to see Grand Pré simply as 'Acadie, home of the happy'.

Notes

1 Canadian Register of Historic Places, *Grand Pré Rural District National Historic Site of Canada, Statement of Significance, Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada,* minutes of July 1995/June 2004. http://www.historicplaces.ca/en/rep-reg/place-lieu.aspx?id=15751&pid=0; UNESCO World Heritage List, *Landscape of Grand Pré, 2012*. http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1404

2 W. Eilers, *et al*. (eds) *Environmental Sustainability of Canadian Agriculture: Agri-Environmental Indicator Report Series – Report No. 3.* (Ottawa: Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2010). http://www4.agr.gc.ca/AAFC-AAC/display-afficher.do?id=1295983968944&lang=eng; Nomination Grand Pré, *Management Plan for the Landscape of Grand Pré*, 2011, 28. http://nominationgrandpre.ca/Dossier/2A%20-%20management%20plan%20landscape%20of%20GP.pdf

3 I am grateful to Conevery Valencius and the other members of the Northeast and Atlantic Canada Environmental History Forum from 2012 for their thoughts on this point.

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