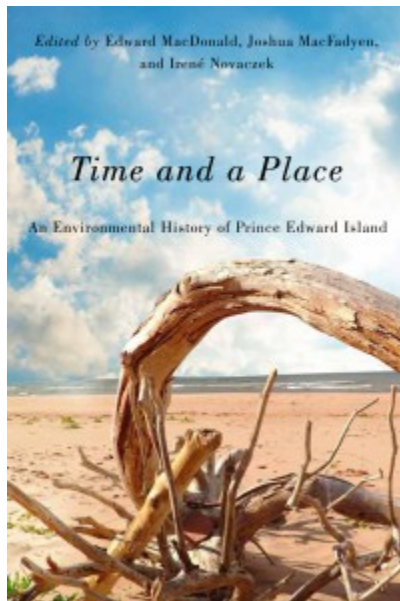


# REVIEW: *TIME AND PLACE*

-----  
Ryan Fischer





Network in Canadian History and Environment

Department of History

York University

2140 Vari Hall

4700 Keele

Toronto, Ontario, M3J 1P3

<http://niche-canada.org>

Fischer, Ryan. Edward MacDonald, Joshua MacFadyen, and Irené Novaczek, eds., *Time and a Place: An Environmental History of Prince Edward Island*. NiCHE Reviews. 31 January 2018.



“Review: Time and Place” by Ryan Fischer is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

## **Network in Canadian History and Environment Reviews**

Editors: Jennifer Bonnell and Ben Bradley

*NiCHE Reviews* is a regular series of book reviews of new work in the fields of Canadian environmental history and historical geography. All reviews can be found at <http://niche-canada.org/reviews>

ISSN 2561-5025

Edward MacDonald, Joshua MacFadyen, and Irené Novaczek, eds., *Time and a Place: An Environmental History of Prince Edward Island*. Montreal & Kingston and Charlottetown: McGill-Queen's University Press and Island Studies Press, 2016. 460 pgs, ISBN 9780773546936.

---

A collection of environmental history articles focusing on a single locale is such an excellent idea that it is surprising that we don't have more of them. *Time and a Place* is a collection which emerged from a 2010 conference about the environmental history of Prince Edward Island, and it offers a focused examination of the human interactions with nature on the small island to create, in the words of the editors, "an environmental mosaic" (9). The contributors come from a wide variety of disciplines, including archaeology, biology, ecology, forestry, and geography, alongside history. Many of them come to this project with policy experience and the result is a perspective that pays close attention to the ways different layers of government, from local to national, have contributed to environmental change.

The book consists of three sections – islands, people, and development – though the differences between the second and third sections are not always clear. The section on islands contains some interesting insights. John R. Gillis highlights the connections of islands to maritime resources and argues that islands can be understood as ecotones, where the interactions between ecosystems provide a rich variety of resources, and, Gillis adds, "creative tensions" (20). Graeme Wynn, in one of the strongest essays in the collection, discusses islands as "showcases" where bounded spaces

encourage people to experiment and display different ideas. Wynn connects this tendency to both L. M. Montgomery's series of "Anne" novels dominating popular perceptions of Prince Edward Island and the 1970s interest in ecology, where the island became home to a back-to-the-land movement and experimental bioshelter.

The next two sections follow the history of resource exploitation on the island. David Keenlyside and Helen Kristmanson explore the archaeology of Mi'kmaq settlement with close attention to their changing relationship with the island's resources. Douglas Sobey's examination of forestry also becomes a history of early French and British settlement, as European settlers cleared forest for farms and then shipbuilding as that industry took center stage under British occupation. Rosemary Curley's history of wildlife on the island shows the gradual development of a conservation ethic, as it traces changing practices from the early destruction of species that were considered threats to mid-twentieth-century citizen engagement in response to threats like DDT. Irené Nocaczek's essay has some of the strongest hints of the potential for a fascinating labor history of the island, as it follows the over-exploitation of sea plants like Irish moss on the coastal commons.

Joshua MacFayden and Jean-Paul Arsenault explore the history of agriculture on Prince Edward Island in two chapters: one before 1970 and the other after. Together they weave a complex tale of fluctuating agrarian policies that struggled in the face of marginal farmlands, weak markets, and environmental problems like erosion and runoff, as cycles of policy favored agricultural production or industrial development. A fascinating story in MacFayden's chapter

details the harvesting of “mussel mud” as a treatment for the island’s acidic soils. Familiar narratives of over-harvest and collapse dominate Edward MacDonald and Boyde Beck’s history of fishing on PEI, but their examination of the island’s various fisheries provides interesting case studies of stocking schemes that led to the introduction of new, destructive species, and of high-minded conservationists in conflict with local laborers’ livelihoods.



Gathering kelp in Rustico, Prince Edward Island, Canada. Department of the Interior. Library and Archives Canada, PA-043975.

Alan MacEachern’s look at the history of tourism of Prince Edward Island through advertisements demonstrates shifts in which island landscapes were most marketable. Early ads celebrated the island as “bustling” but by the mid-twentieth century beaches and pastoralism received more attention. Kathleen Stuart explores the heavy energy footprint of an island that is “energy-poor by Canadian standards” (285) but requires significant energy expenditures for heating.

While the book's interdisciplinarity and policy-oriented perspective offer some of its greatest strengths, environmental historians might find some frustration in the general lack of engagement with historiography. The essays here often fail to connect their subject matter to broader debates in environmental history. And despite the close focus on a relatively small region, the essays can (as often happens in collections) feel disconnected from each other. It takes an engaged reader to draw out an overall narrative connecting the different resource-harvesting regimes, from forestry to lobstering to collecting Irish moss to potato farming. Another theme, common in environmental histories of agrarian communities, that runs through the collection and perhaps deserved more focused consideration is the tension in local communities between an inherent conservation ethic in favor of preserving familiar landscapes, and an opposition to any effort to restrict their exploitation of nearby resources. One of the most interesting stories that runs through the book is that of the Institute of Man and Resources, an ecologically-oriented think-tank that worked on the island in the 1970s. It appears (and disappears) in three different essays, and I wondered if it deserved its own focused chapter.

*Time and a Place* does have an excellent capstone – an epilogue by Claire Campbell, which does not try to impose an overarching narrative but does draw out a number of fascinating themes from the collection. Several of the essays mention how the nature of islands – their separation from and connections to the mainland – have affected their history, but it is Campbell who provides the most compelling and original observations with her focus on islands as

microcosms that illustrate change over time, the limits of self-sufficiency, and the environment's role in defining identity. It probably goes without saying that this would be an invaluable resource for anyone studying the history of Prince Edward Island. It also could serve, both in its successes and in its shortcomings, as a model for similar place-based anthologies of environmental history, of which I hope to read more. And I would highly recommend Claire Campbell's epilogue, as well as the first two essays by Gillis and Wynn, to any scholar exploring the environmental history of islands.

---

**Ryan Fischer** is a Visiting Assistant Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin - River Falls. His book *Cattle Colonialism* explores the impacts of introduced livestock on indigenous peoples and empires in California and Hawai'i. His current project examines the history of Sauk and Meskwaki people through their many migrations until mid-nineteenth century removals.