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Popular by our Misery: The International Response to the 1825 Miramichi Fire

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"POPULAR BY OUR MISERY":

THE INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE TO THE 1825 MIRAMICHI FIRE

ALAN MACEACHERN

When Robert Cooney emigrated from Ireland to New Brunswick in 1824, he moved to the bustling Miramichi region in the colony's northeast. The region had been largely unpopulated by Europeans until the Napoleonic wars, at which point Great Britain, cut off from Baltic timber, turned to its North American colonies to meet its needs. With its large stands of uncut white pine and red spruce and its ready access to the Atlantic, the Miramichi was suddenly lucrative. Immigrants poured in, and two rival lumber towns — Newcastle and Chatham — sprang up along the Miramichi River. These were frontier, wild east towns, filled with young single men with money in their pockets — and everything that implies. In what is surely an apocryphal story, a recently arrived minister told of having asked a child where bad people go. The reply: "To the Miramichi." Cooney was working in a mercantile firm and living only a mile from Newcastle when on 7 October 1825 a huge forest fire swept across the region, leveling Newcastle and other communities on the north side of the river and killing an estimated 160 people. Early reports that the fire had burned across 6,000 square miles, one-fifth of New Brunswick, were confirmed or at least accepted by virtually every single commentator over the generation that followed. This would make the Miramichi fire one of the largest recorded forest fires in Canadian history and the largest one on the continent's eastern seaboard.

It is little wonder that when Cooney, having turned to writing, published *A Compendious History of the Northern Part of the Province of New Brunswick* in 1832, the fire received pride of place. His book devotes 15 pages to it, more than he gives the entire 18th century. Historian M. Brook Taylor calls Cooney's interpretation of the region's history "unique, for he put at the centre of his account not the arrival of the Loyalists or the conquest of New France but the region's own Great Fire."[1] This is not really so unusual: natural disasters are often portrayed as causing a societal rupture, producing a before-and-after periodization. More specifically, they are

often seen as cathartic, offering the possibility of reform and redemption.[2] Cooney's history can be interpreted as chronicling how the fire readjusted northern New Brunswick, moving the region from speculative lumbering to respectable agriculture. In describing the pre-fire period, the author takes a few swipes at lumbermen ("men of little property and less integrity"); his glowing, one-page description of contemporary Miramichi is by contrast filled with praise for farming ("Agriculture is rapidly advancing" even as it "mildly reproves us for our former negligence"). Even so, Cooney's narrative arc is not clear-cut. Whereas one would expect him, in depicting life before 1825, to present a dark and demoralized society, he instead paints a scene of joyful optimism: "Every heart throbbed with pleasure; present enjoyment inspired coeval happiness; and future prospects opened a pleasant way before us." And after the fire, just before mentioning agriculture's advance, he notes that "the sphere of our manufacture has been enlarged by the erection of Sawmills."[3] Forestry was still very much underway and contributing to society. It is as if Cooney wants to tell a story of change but constancy keeps leaking through.

Historians who have followed Cooney have given the Miramichi fire far less prominence. Although the fire had a significant bearing on New Brunswick's economy, demography, and forest ecology, and although it received more international coverage than any other New Brunswick topic during the 19th century, it all but disappeared in provincial and regional histories written during the 20th century. W.S. MacNutt's 1963 history of the colony before Confederation gives it just two sentences, Phillip Buckner and John Reid's 1994 *The Atlantic Region to Confederation* just one. Graeme Wynn's 1981 *Timber Colony*, which can hardly be said to downplay the importance of nature in colonial New Brunswick, spends only a paragraph on the fire. At nine pages, W.F. Ganong's 1906 "On the Limits of the Great Fire of Miramichi of 1825" remains the most sustained historical analysis of the disaster.[4] Such longstanding inattention can be attributed to the fact that historians generally treated humans' interactions with nature, although obviously fundamental to existence, as an unsuitable topic for serious historical study. Natural disasters — lurid, haphazard, and apparently beyond human causation — seemed particularly unsuitable. Environmental history has in recent decades arisen as a field intent on exploring the interplay between humans and nature through time. Natural disasters have proven an especially rich vein for historical mining. That is in part because during such disasters the nature-culture interplay is suddenly

Figure 1. R. Thresher, "View of Beaubear`s Island, Miramichi" [ca. 1825] (Provincial Collection, Heritage Branch, New Brunswick/Collection provinciale, Direction du Patrimoine, Nouveau-Brunswick, Accession number GH 996.9.1).

right at the surface, and so people produce sources that explore their relationship with nature and describe natural surroundings and processes. And it is also in part because historians uncover the human dimensions underlying natural disasters, the degree to which such disasters are never entirely natural.[5]

But historians' long neglect of environmental topics such as the Miramichi fire has done more than forego an opportunity to explore past nature-culture relationships, because missing those stories has meant missing the stories that spiraled out from them; there is a multiplier effect. Consider Robert Cooney's book. Even to the extent that Cooney sees the fire as shifting the Miramichi region from forestry to agriculture, his focus is on how the fire produced a more geographically expansive transformation — one that "introduced a new era into this province." Such a watershed

required not just the fire but also the international charity effort it produced. When Cooney first mentions the fire he calls it "a calamity, which making us popular by our misery, introduced us to a sorrowful intimacy with most of the civilized nations of the earth." Having described the fire, he turns in his inimitably baroque fashion to the international response: "Never were the tender offices of charity more indispensably necessary than on this occasion, and never, perhaps, were they more promptly and seasonably executed. The piercing cry of suffering humanity, ringing far and wide, had penetrated through the glades of the forest, and into the splendours of the city. Its wailing echo resounded through the neighboring Provinces; at the extremity of the Federal States; and beyond the waves of the Atlantic." After continuing in this vein for a while, Cooney offers a detailed five-page accounting of the relief effort, taken from the local relief committee's report.[6] The subsequent discussion of the turn to agriculture receives far less space. That Cooney discusses the time surrounding the fire in terms of constancy suddenly makes more sense. By his account, 1825 was epochal for New Brunswick not so much because of the fire that shattered the colony but because of the response that pulled it back together.

This chapter examines the international relief effort that arose in the wake of the 1825 Miramichi fire. The news of the conflagration and the fact that it had left hundreds of people dead and thousands homeless on the eve of a northern winter excited sympathy and generosity all across the Western world that fall. The neighbouring British North American colonies gave the most per capita in terms of supplies and funds, presumably because they felt the greatest sense of kinship. Great Britain, as the colony's mother country and the actual homeland of many of its colonists, also made sure to represent itself well. And citizens of the United States gave generously despite having been at war with Britain and her colonies just a decade earlier and despite Maine having suffered from its own fires the same day. This is not to say that the 1825 relief effort was without precedent: Great Britain, for example, had a long tradition of providing disaster relief within its own borders, and by the mid-18th century this had spread to assisting its colonies. Nor was the scale of the 1825 drive unmatched: the British Parliament directed a huge sum to victims of an 1831 hurricane in the colonial West Indies whereas it made no allocation to the Miramichi sufferers whatsoever.[7] But the Miramichi case stands as one of the largest disaster relief efforts in pre-Confederation Canada. This is particularly remarkable in that it was not an urban disaster, where both

victims and donors are more plentiful and more prosperous.

In terms of New Brunswick history, the relief effort is most valuable in exploring the province's relationship with its mother country, its sister colonies, and the United States at a time when it was coming into its own. In 1825, the colonies of British North America were Great Britain's leading source of timber. Of these colonies, New Brunswick produced the most, and within New Brunswick, the Miramichi region produced the most. New Brunswick was experiencing a period of dramatic economic and population growth, nowhere more so than the Miramichi. The great fire threatened to fracture this, but the assistance that subsequently flooded in suggested it could be repaired. Moreover, the distribution of relief offered an opportunity — if handled orderly and fairly — for New Brunswickers generally and Miramichiers in particular to demonstrate their society's maturity. For donors, dispensers, and recipients, the Miramichi fire relief effort served as an expression of the colony's sense of self and of its relationship with distant peoples.

It would later be said that for the first two days after the fire had swept over the communities of the Miramichi, the survivors did not have the presence of mind to respond to what had befallen them.[8] But when they did, on 10 October, it was with a clear understanding that they needed help and that to get it they must communicate the dire extremity of their situation.[9] As a result, they not only sent letters describing their plight on ships bound for Halifax, Quebec City, Fredericton, Saint John, Pictou, and Charlottetown, but they also issued a handbill to be distributed widely, which began with the following appeal:

> Fire and Hurricane!
> Amidst confusion and distress, the inevitable consequences of the dreadful dispensation of Providence, which has befallen our devoted colony, it is altogether impossible to calculate or describe the extent of its destructive effects, but to awaken the sympathy of those who under the Divine Protection of Almighty God, have escaped the awful calamity, it will be sufficient thus briefly to state, that more than a Hundred Miles of the shores of Miramichi are laid waste; independent of the North west Branch, the Bartibogue, and the Nappan Settlements, from one or two hundred people have perished within immediate observation, and thrice that number are miserably burnt or otherwise wounded; and

> at least two thousand of our fellow creatures are left destitute of the means of subsistence, and thrown at present upon the humanity of the Province of New Brunswick.[10]

A relief committee was also formed, promising to meet every morning at 10 o'clock.[11] The committee dispatched Justice of the Peace William Joplin to Fredericton to notify Lieutenant Governor Howard Douglas of the fire; once there, Douglas sent Joplin on to Quebec. A Fredericton-based relief committee had already been established on the 8th to assist the sufferers of the fire that burned around the capital, and when that committee learned of the fire's extended reach it extended its reach too.

Word of the fire spread. The express ship arrived in Halifax on the 15th and within a day £1,200 in relief was raised, £800 more the following day.[12] In Quebec, the Lieutenant Governor Earl of Dalhousie wrote in his diary of receiving a Mr. "Hoplin" of New Brunswick and granting "such blankets and woolen cloaths as could be spared, with six months Provisions for 1000 people, in flour & Pork &&&."[13] Joplin provided the Quebec newspapers with what was fast becoming the standard account of the fire, an article beginning: "On the night of the 7th inst this place exhibited the terrible spectacle of a general conflagration."[14] This article and a few others were reprinted broadly throughout the English-speaking world that autumn. In late November, a 48-page pamphlet was published in Halifax for distribution throughout the Americas and Europe to encourage charity. Sold for 2 shillings each or 12 for 20, *A Narrative of the Late Fires at Miramichi, New Brunswick* compiled newspaper items, survivors' accounts, and — presumably to arouse pity — lurid new descriptions of death and destruction.[15]

The elements of the tragedy were sure to captivate. Here were small communities of British settlers living on the edge of a vast wilderness, experiencing a holocaust of apparently unprecedented size and ferocity, and who, having survived, looked forward only to the loss of home, the loss of livelihood, and a cold winter. It was an event both domestic and apocalyptic, and commentators spoke of it in biblical terms. "I am persuaded," wrote one witness, ". . . that never since the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah has the world witnessed a scene so terrific and appalling; for only a country such as this (the face of which is one interminable forest) could produce a conflagration so great and so awful."[16] A Canadian newspaper similarly argued that the fire had produced devastation "far greater than

any which have ever been occasioned by any similar accident since the Creation of the World."[17] The charity pamphlet called it "an ocean of fire that we may conclude to be unparalleled in the history of forest countries, and perhaps not surpassed in horrific sublimity by any natural calamity from this element, that has ever been recorded."[18] It is difficult to measure how readers received such reports — the relief effort itself is probably the best barometer — but there can be little doubt the reports resonated. A full generation later, the Scottish author of an emigration manual would recall:

> The celebrated fire in Miramichi at once horrified and astonished all the civilised world; and perhaps, for the first time, conveyed an adequate notion of the vastness and compactness of the North American forests. When first recorded in the newspapers, it appeared like some wild fiction. People were accustomed to hear of tenements being burned down before their unfortunate inhabitants could escape, and of several thus perishing in some great city conflagration; but that the fire should literally travel over a province — that its influence should be felt for days before it actually reached its victims — and that they should find, with both the land and the water before them, no means of escape from its devastating approach, seemed something incomprehensible.[19]

Donations were raised wherever news of the fire reached. The government of Lower Canada granted £2,500, Upper Canada and Nova Scotia £1,000 each, and New Brunswick itself £5,000. New Brunswick's Lieutenant Governor Howard Douglas personally contributed £110. A gold ring was donated at a Halifax Baptist meeting. There were charity sermons in Montreal and Halifax, a theatrical production in Fredericton, a concert by the Phil-Harmonic Society in Saint John. The Nova Scotia towns of Pictou, Liverpool, and Chester gave £700 between them, plus 900 bushels of potatoes and 50 bushels of wheat. Ships were dispatched to Miramichi with food, clothing, bedding, and other supplies. Newspaper reports of the day listed the largest subscriptions, and in time the Miramichi and Fredericton-based committees compiled overall figures, but much of the relief effort was the product of countless small individual and anonymous acts of charity.[20]

Generosity flowed just as freely from the United States. Historian Robert H. Bremner has noted that while many encouragements existed

in the young republic to make money, there were few to spend it and so Americans tended to give generously to foreign relief.[21] In the Miramichi case, Thomas Dixon of New York stepped forward early and offered $5,000 (about £1,000) in advance of donations he was confident would come.[22] Spurred by newspapers' publication of subscription lists, there arose a competition to see which city would give the most. "Boston had done most nobly" and "Philadelphia has at length taken the field," a New York paper noted, but it was happy to report that its own city had raised $3,884 in a single day.[23] Boston's noble response may have been a result of its longtime connection to the Maritimes, and in particular to New Brunswick Loyalists. Thirty-five Boston churches collected money for the Miramichi, and the schooner *Billows* sailed twice to Halifax with provisions.[24] Even residents of Eastport, Maine, well aware that the October fires had also wreaked havoc on their state, raised $400 to help the New Brunswick survivors.[25]

This American aid to the British colony is especially impressive given that they had fought the War of 1812 only a decade earlier and were still engaged in a long-festering dispute over the Maine-New Brunswick border. The relief effort in the U.S. was frequently promoted as a way to confirm and fortify America's close relationship with Great Britain and her colonies. A Boston circular reminded readers of "the good principles which ought to regulate international friendliness and courtesy of neighbouring countries . . . ."[26] Such thinking was framed most vividly by George Manners, the British Consul in Massachusetts, whose long poem "The Conflagration" was published with all proceeds going to aid victims of the Miramichi fire; the poem itself is quite awful: while the editors of the Boston *Patriot* admired its underlying motivation, they could say of its quality only that it was "a handsome specimen of typography."[27] Manners presented the fire as a God-given opportunity to overcome past British and American differences, and ended the poem,

> Of Nature — O, may thy bland influence bind
> In one vast family all human kind,
> Soften asperities of kindred States,
> Blot our all traces of unnat'ral hates,
> Conciliate feelings lib'ral, just and kind,
> And re-unite the ties by feuds disjoin'd![28]

British North American commentators shared such sentiments. Halifax personages Enos Collins and Brenton Halliburton sent a thank-you to Boston, saying that although American generosity would have been on display had the victims been "the African, the Asiatics, or the American Savage," they were confident that it had been increased by the knowledge "that we are all descended from Common Forefathers."[29] Likewise, a Miramichi man wrote to a Boston friend, in a letter republished in American papers, that American aid made evident that "the late hostile and unpleasant feelings" between the two nations was gone and that "good and friendly feeling" now reigned "between the two greatest and I trust one day will be the most firmly allied nations in the world."[30] By the time the charity pamphlet *A Narrative of the Late Fires* was published in late November, its author was able to praise "the flame of sympathy" that had already raised £25,000 in subscriptions — and this before Great Britain had been heard from.[31]

Word of the fire reached Britain on 10 November, when the *Lydia* arrived in Liverpool from Miramichi; the London *Times* carried its first article about the fire the next day. Amazingly, British readers that autumn read richer and more varied accounts of the fire than did North Americans (including New Brunswickers). Rather than relying on just a few early descriptions that then circulated from newspaper to newspaper, the British press had access to more first-person reports from eyewitnesses. There were New Brunswick residents who wrote letters to reassure family members and businesses in Britain, and these letters were then published. There were also recent immigrants to New Brunswick who had lost everything in the fire and returned to the mother country on the first ship that would take them. The *Diana*, for example, carried back to Scotland 28 people for whom "the prospect of a long and dreary winter, with the anticipated scarcity of provisions in the colony, made them all eagerly embrace the opportunity of returning to a home where they knew they would meet with sympathetic friends."[32] Reports from survivors such as these in large and small British newspapers sank out of sight, reappearing only in the age of internet databases.

The charity effort began in London the same day as the first *Times* story appeared, with a public meeting organized by New Brunswick's agents in Great Britain, John Bainbridge and Henry Bliss. "Appeals to the charity of the British nation were, it was well known, not infrequent," Bliss admitted, "but never was there a more pitiable ground for an appeal

of such a nature than that which had lately come to the public knowledge." He spoke of the nature of fire in such wooded land, how it wiped out anything and everything in its path, leaving all equally bereft. And those few whose property miraculously survived, he intimated, were in danger of having it looted by the others. The *Times* reported that Bliss further motivated his countrymen by noting that Americans were sure to be helping already: "The unfortunate event would not fail to excite commiseration in the United States. He really felt jealous of the liberality of that country to a British colony" and urged British generosity to redeem itself. A committee was formed and £2,600 committed at that first meeting, including £50 from Bliss and £100 from the Colonial Secretary, the Earl Bathurst.[33] For the next month, the *Times* ran almost daily notice of the campaign, complete with names of new donors and more firsthand accounts as they appeared.

The disaster was of special interest in Great Britain because it had struck a British colony, and one with which the mother country had significant interaction. How could the people of Wales, for example, not be moved upon hearing of Welsh immigrants who had been killed or displaced by a fire that was, by some estimates, as large as Wales itself? A song about the fire was composed in Welsh, published, and sold for donations.[34] The city of Liverpool voted to donate £300 and in the course of discussion raised the sum to £500.[35] Aberdeen likewise held a meeting to explore how best to help the sufferers. The local newspaper referred to "the Miramichi" without further geographical reference, indicating both that the region was known to Scottish readers and that the New Brunswick fires were becoming defined strictly in terms of that region.[36]

Noticeably absent from British discussion of the fire and the subsequent relief effort was what effect, if any, this colonial disaster might have on Britain itself. Miramichi was Britain's leading supplier of timber in 1825, but only one newspaper article even spoke of the region's future wood supply, and not in terms of Great Britain at all.[37] At the initial London charity meeting, chair John Bainbridge asked specifically that some funds be directed to helping the people of Miramichi purchase seeds and farm implements. Although Miramichi was a region built on forestry and of value to Britain principally in terms of forestry, there remained the expectation that it would move toward agriculture.

The British relief effort ultimately raised about £10,000 for the people of the Miramichi. This was more than any other place contributed, but given Britain's size, wealth, and status as the mother country the amount

was a disappointment if not an outright failure. The nation had 45 times the population of Lower Canada, for example, yet had given less than twice as much. After the £2,600 donated at the initial 11 November meeting in London, less than that amount again was raised through the remainder of the year. The London relief committee publicly blamed this apparent parsimoniousness on the fact that the New Brunswick government had been unable to send word about the fire with the first mail packet and, as a result, the early, unofficial accounts were thought by some to be exaggerated.[38] But privately it was understood that the shortfall occurred because Britain was at that very moment undergoing a crisis of its own. Throughout the early 1820s, British investors had speculated heavily in bonds issued by the fragmented, independent states formed from the collapse of the Spanish empire in the Americas. Many of those bonds were of dubious value, such as those from the entirely fictitious republic of Poyais in Belize. The bubble burst in late 1825, with the failure of many British country banks occurring that autumn and then a raft of London banks collapsing in December.[39] George Baillie, head clerk in the North American department of the Colonial Office and brother of New Brunswick's commissioner of Crown Lands Thomas Baillie, wrote the colony's lieutenant governor, admitting that the aid effort had been largely unsuccessful "from the most extraordinary convulsion in the Money Market (which I trust is only temporary). . . . People who would have given £50 or £100 a few months ago are now content with a subscription of £5."[40] Early in the new year, when members of the Miramichi relief committee called upon the mayor of London with the subscriptions "very much on the decline," the mayor said that "he did not at all wonder at the low condition of the funds for relief . . . when there were all around us such evidence of distress." The public was naturally focused on "domestic calamities."[41] The phrase is revealing: the fact that a calamity had befallen a British colony did not make it a domestic matter. Britain's interests were so extensive and diverse that the fate of an imaginary republic in Belize could figure just as prominently as that of its real, foremost timber colony in North America.

But if anyone in New Brunswick thought the British relief effort tepid, there is no record of it. Instead, the people of the colony were overwhelmingly appreciative, even moved by the sympathy and support the charity drive had generated across North America, Great Britain, and beyond.[42] Those on the ground took it as a great responsibility to ensure the aid would be distributed in a just and Christian fashion.

As already mentioned, Newcastle and Chatham were rival timber company towns on opposite banks of the Miramichi River — until the great fire obliterated both Newcastle and the rivalry. The leading men of Chatham formed a Miramichi relief committee and hurriedly communicated word of the disaster and of people's need for assistance. They then waited weeks to learn how their far-flung appeal would be received. While they waited, they diplomatically invited their Newcastle counterparts to join the committee.[43] The weather cooperated this time, staying warm enough that autumn to keep the river open for ships.[44] On 30 October, the warship H.M.S. *Orestes* was the first to appear, with provisions dispatched from Halifax. The 277-ton *St. Lawrence* soon arrived from Quebec carrying supplies donated by the Canadas. Fifteen more vessels — out of Saint John, Bay of Chaleur, Pictou, Antigonish, Halifax, Lunenburg, St. John's, and Boston — all landed within a short period, all bearing aid for sufferers and all bearing witness to the great success of the committee's appeal.

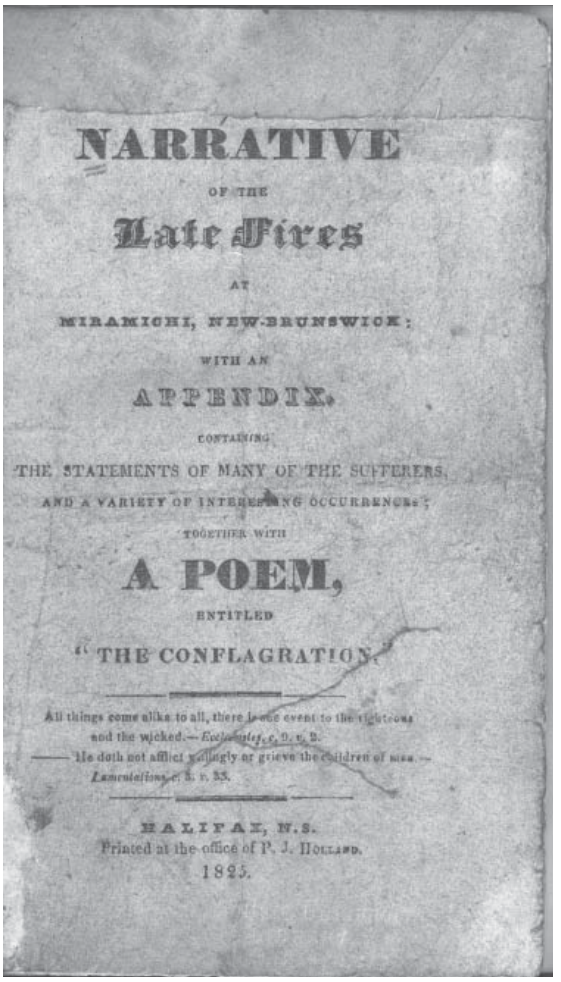
Although the committee modestly stated later that it would be "as unnecessary as it would be uninteresting, to enter into a minute detail of their proceedings," the members were proud to report that they distributed the necessities of life to more than 3,000 people for the next six months.[45] Goods were organized and allocated efficiently: a family of six were initially allotted a suit of clothes with shoes, 24 yards of osnaburgh fabric, four blankets, a barrel of flour, six of potatoes, one of meal, one of pork or two of fish, plus tea and sugar.[46] The initial fears of widespread starvation and civil collapse evaporated. The relief effort's focus on feeding, clothing, and housing the survivors turned, during the months that followed, to financially compensating those who had lost property in the fire; three years later, the Miramichi committee in its final report felt obliged to defend financial compensation as a necessary stage in the aid process. The committee members acknowledged that "an opinion has prevailed, particularly in Great-Britain, that when once the more formidable effects of the fire had been subdued, the people might be quickly restored to a situation not much inferior to that which they enjoyed before their dreadful visitation." The committee members argued, however, that whereas Britain's societal infrastructure ensured that disasters there were of temporary and limited effect, in an infant colony such as New Brunswick the survivors of disaster essentially had to rebuild from scratch.[47]

So much food and supplies arrived on Miramichi's shores in the fall of 1825 that as early as 21 November Samuel Cunard, head of the Halifax

relief effort and brother of Chatham timber merchant and local committee treasurer Joseph Cunard, stated publicly that no more provisions were presently needed.[48] It is hardly surprising that those who had read in newspapers or heard in sermons apocalyptic descriptions of the Miramichi fire, and had been moved to donate money and supplies, were bewildered by such optimistic reports. What did it mean that many of the survivors were apparently moving toward recovery, that lumbering would go on, that many trees still stood? There was no scientific let alone public knowledge of forest fire dynamics, so no understanding that a fire in a mixed forest such as the Miramichi typically burns only one-third of an area. The obvious conclusion to be drawn was that the original reports of the fire had been exaggerated. But this was a difficult charge to level directly, since people did not want to distrust victims and they wanted their charity to have made a difference — to have contributed to this apparent turnabout. Reporting in early 1826 that when opening the legislature Sir Howard Douglas had referred to New Brunswick's prosperity, the London *Times* commented, "The inhabitants of Halifax appeared thunderstruck at the expressions; they understood the greater proportion of the country was ruined by the late fire; but supposed his Excellency had got hold of an old speech."[49] The newspaper, however, left it at that. It did not ask the awkward follow-up question as to whether the country really was ruined and, if not, why not.

It was left to the people of the Miramichi to admit that there was doubt abroad as to the scale of their misfortune. The editor of the Chatham *Mercury* noted: "To such of our readers as are aware, that in some quarters, the loss by the fire in Miramichi was supposed to be overrated."[50] Likewise, when the Miramichi relief committee published its final report in 1829, it delicately admitted that "an opinion might very naturally arise as the novelty subsided, that more money had been subscribed than the urgency of the case required," and so explained in detail how so much money, as well as provisions, had been usefully dispensed.[51] But in 1825 and 1826, this was more than just a matter of the Miramichi's reputation: subscriptions were promises to donate money, so if a feeling grew that the scale of the catastrophe had been exaggerated, subscribers might not pay up. It would be extremely difficult to determine whether the Miramichi relief effort dealt with more delinquent subscriptions than did other charity drives, and impossible to determine whether that delinquency was primarily caused by a belief that the disaster had been overstated or by the contemporary

financial crisis; but it is clear that throughout 1826 some subscribers did not follow through on their pledges.[52] All the organizers could do was ensure that every bit of charity was well spent — accumulating, in the process, evidence of the scale of disaster. In December 1825, the Miramichi committee distributed forms to all survivors, asking them to compile on a sworn oath an itemized list of all the losses they sustained in the fire.[53] By February, the committee had a full tally of the fire's devastation: 160 dead, 3,078 sufferers, 875 dead livestock, £30,000 in losses of manufactured timber, and £248,523 in total losses.[54]


NARRATIVE

OF THE

Late Fires

AT

MIRAMICHI, NEW-BRUNSWICK;

WITH AN

APPENDIX,

CONTAINING

THE STATEMENTS OF MANY OF THE SUFFERERS,

AND A VARIETY OF INTERESTING OCCURRENCES;

TOGETHER WITH

A POEM,

ENTITLED

"THE CONFLAGRATION."

All things come alike to all, there is one event to the righteous and the wicked.—*Ecclesiastes*, c. 9. v. 2.

—— He doth not afflict willingly or grieve the children of men.—*Lamentations*, c. 3. v. 33.

HALIFAX, N.S.

Printed at the office of P. J. Holland.

1825.

Figure 1.
Narrative of the Late Fires at Miramichi, New Brunswick (1825) (Special Collections, Killam Library, Dalhousie University).

But such accounting and the relief effort more generally were complicated by the fact that there were two separate New Brunswick groups accepting donations and distributing relief. Besides the Miramichi committee, there was a Fredericton committee that had been convened by Lieutenant Governor Douglas on 8 October, the day after a tongue of the great fire had destroyed 40 houses in the capital. This committee consisted of leaders of the colonial establishment and was chaired by Crown Lands and Forests Commissioner Thomas Baillie.[55] Once Fredericton learned that fire had the same day torched the Miramichi and Oromocto rivers, this evolved into a "central committee" that, because of its power and connections, took responsibility for the major subscription drives in British and American cities as well as legislative grants and the aid flowing directly to the lieutenant governor. The existence of two relief groups raised two related problems. First, there was the matter of divining and weighing the significance of what motivated relief. On the one hand, it was the accounts of death and devastation on the Miramichi that received all the press and that presumably led people in Glasgow, Quebec City, and Philadelphia to open their wallets; so perhaps the people of the Miramichi deserved disproportionate relief. On the other hand, a fire was a fire, a survivor a survivor; a farmer burned out on the Oromocto on 7 October was as much a victim of the "Miramichi" fire as was a farmer on the Miramichi. The second problem was that Fredericton properties tended to be better established and more valuable, so the Fredericton crowd might calculate their town's losses as proportionally greater than those on the Miramichi. If the relief effort was poorly handled, it could easily drift into accusations of illegitimacy and misappropriation.

The colonial government moved to forestall such trouble by launching a commission in February 1826 to investigate losses by the fire. The five commissioners — notably including a member from each of the Miramichi and central committees — were also to develop a system for the distribution of funds. That spring, they travelled through the burned-over areas of New Brunswick taking sworn and corroborated statements of losses.[56] It is clear in the Miramichi newspaper, the *Mercury*, that local citizens were anxious. If the commissioners found that the damage in the Miramichi had been overestimated — or even that its damage relative to other regions had been — not only would the Miramichi's reputation be sullied but it would receive reduced financial aid. It was a relief when the commissioners reported their findings that summer. They concluded that

the total damage in the colony generally and the Miramichi specifically was as significant as originally supposed: total losses were calculated at around £225,000, of which £193,000 occurred on the Miramichi. They also recognized that the Miramichi's unique role in attracting charity gave it a unique claim to receiving charity: "The ruling principle in the distribution of every donation, must be the intention of the donor." The commissioners calculated that the Miramichi had already received £11,800 of relief, Fredericton £984, and Oromocto and Charlotte £953. They advised that of the £20,000 more still available to the colony, £18,000 be distributed now, of which people in Miramichi should receive £15,500, Fredericton £1,700, and Oromocto and Charlotte £800.[57] The *Mercury*'s editor James Pierce could not have been happier: "To say that ample justice has been done to Miramichi, is to say too little; we know that public expectation was carried to a pretty high pitch — and yet we find that all agree in saying, the result is beyond their most sanguine expectations."[58] The Miramichi and its fire had been vindicated.

The commission also concluded that distribution should be handled by local committees who knew the local conditions, but it did offer strong opinions as to which classes should and should not receive aid. This had become a key question in the Miramichi fire relief effort when it became clear just how much charity was flowing in. "The question now arises," stated the *Novascotian* in November 1825, "how this large sum is to be disposed of — it is quite too much to distribute among the lower class of sufferers" — presumably because it would pull them out of the lower class. The newspaper's opinion was that the singular nature of this disaster "ought to remove that feeling of stern, though manly independence, which should actuate men upon ordinary occasions." [59] That is, the fire had reduced people of all classes to an equal state of destitution so even those who had been well-off should accept charity as well. Receiving aid was an awkward matter in a society that assumed a correlation between wealth and goodness, poverty and sin. It was especially awkward in this case because the conflagration seemed freighted with religious meaning. Were sinful, wasteful lumbermen the fire's cause, contributing not only the reason for divine retribution and an appropriate form that retribution should take, but also — by leaving forest slash in their wake — the means of retribution?[60]

After separating losses into those suffered by merchants and traders, mechanics, professional men, farmers, lumberers, labourers, tavern-

keepers, and widows and single women, the commissioners removed without explanation the merchants and traders, professional men, and tavernkeepers from the list of "proper objects of the charitable donations." They devoted the final sentences of their report to stressing why farmers deserved the most consideration: "Persons of this class beginning in the wilderness, have accumulated their means under severe privations, by hard labour, and slow degrees, and the fruit of years of patient industry, is swept away from them in an instant. They have now the same laborious process to go over again, under circumstances of infinite disadvantage, arising from the very devastation which has caused their ruin."[61] The commissioners thus voiced not only their preference for agriculture, but also the widely held belief that forest fires vaporized the soil. Put another way, the commissioners were arguing that farming remained the proper activity of new settlers even on the marginal farmland of northeastern New Brunswick and even if the great fire had made farming a more dubious prospect than ever.[62]

The timber trade merited no such consideration. The commission refused outright to compile losses on cut timber or standing wood, owing to the "obvious impracticability of ascertaining it with precision," although admitting such losses were immense.[63] The Miramichi relief committee likewise displayed its preference for agriculture when it moved forward and implemented the provincial commission's recommendations. The committee's final report, published in 1828, plagiarized the commission's glowing tribute to farmers and then bluntly added of its own initiative that lumberers by comparison deserved "but little claim" for assistance. The Miramichi committee categorized sufferers in nine classes: of these, lumberers had the fourth largest amount of allowable losses, yet they received the eighth largest amount of relief. Innkeepers received more total aid than did lumbermen.[64] It is a powerful testimonial to the agrarian ideal that, even in a community built on forestry, those who worked in the lumber industry were looked upon as less than fully deserving. It is also telling that there is no record of anyone complaining that the disaster relief was distributed in this fashion.[65]

Given the care the organizers took in documenting the relief process, there is surprisingly little evidence about which specific families and individuals received how much aid. Because receiving charity was such a fundamentally embarrassing admission, there is almost no published detail or discussion as to the actual distribution of aid.[66] The bulk of

funds ——were presumably given out in the second half of 1826, after the government commission published its recommendations, although even that is uncertain; a November 1826 newspaper mentioned that a shipment of relief funds was on its way to the Miramichi, guarded by military escort.[67] But it would seem that, all in all, the Miramichi fire charity drive had been launched, organized, and dispensed with alacrity.

And yet in the years that followed the relief effort did not die away. Other victims of fire came forward with petitions that offered incidental critiques on the limits of the original charity. William Murray of Gagetown, southeast of Fredericton, lost his house to the 1825 fire and petitioned Lieutenant Governor Douglas individually for aid in 1827 because "although the County in many sections suffered severely," Gagetown had been outside the general range of relief. He received the £12 he requested.[68] Likewise, James Campbell and Ammon Fowler of Kings County, in the south end of the province, petitioned for a share of the available funds for losses sustained in an August 1825 forest fire.[69] Such cases argued implicitly that although in terms of the relief effort the 7 October Miramichi fire had provided a useful focus to the devastation, it had also simplified a complex of fires that had burned over a larger area and over a longer period in 1825. Nor did the great fire spell the last of burning forests, and so there was a stream of letters requesting funds from the central committee for losses by fires in 1826 through 1828. The committee was accommodating to such requests, mostly because it still retained some money from the relief effort — which, considering that all the money raised had been only a fraction of the losses sustained, shows how tightly relief funds were controlled. The central committee ultimately resolved to hold the remaining money to help victims of the future fires that would surely come.

This decision may have been reasonable, but it was moving ever farther away from the original donors' intentions. In 1831, a group of donors from Glasgow, Scotland, took the Miramichi committee to Scottish court, demanding that £600 in unspent funds be released and turned over to another colonial charity (the Pictou Academy). In the words of the court report, there were "statements circulated here that there was no distress still subsisting attributable to the fires." The Miramichi committee might have taken this criticism as a sign it was time to fold operations, but it instead fought the case. It won by providing evidence that the funds were still needed and still being spent.[70] The Fredericton-based central committee held its final meeting the following year and emptied the larder. Some of its

funds were transferred to the still-existing Miramichi committee and, for the remainder, "resolved that the above Balance of £170 be immediately apportioned and distributed among such of the Sufferers in Fredericton, whose Losses were the most Severe, and *who still labour under its desolating effects*."[71] The Miramichi fire charity effort had improbably swept across the Western world in the fall of 1825 with something of the speed and intensity of the fire itself, but its impress, also like that of the fire, lasted much longer.

In its final report the Miramichi fire relief committee declared that it had overseen the distribution of £37,606 worth of provisions and funds, which suggests that assistance to the entire colony was in the range of £50,000.[72]. This is an impressive amount, corresponding to millions of dollars in present-day terms.[73] Still, that represented only a fraction of the colony's economy and, more pertinently, of the losses sustained in the fire. But its significance was much greater. For a time during the autumn of 1825, the Miramichi fire, its victims, and its survivors were the talk of newspapers, sermons, and coffeehouses across the Western world and were the stuff of poetry and song. This outpouring of interest and aid was of great comfort to the people of New Brunswick and in particular to those of the Miramichi region. It united them in a common experience while simultaneously connecting them to the wider world, as Robert Cooney in his 1832 history suggests. It reassured the people, many of whom were recent arrivals, that they remained tied to Great Britain and to her other colonies. At any number of points the charity effort might easily have bred controversy — when the British contribution was unexpectedly small, for example, or when the committees determined which professions merited relief — but there is no record of discord among New Brunswickers. There is, in fact, no indication that they even noticed such things. Instead, the assistance received was spoken of at the time and in the years to come only with pride — a remarkable thing in itself, given the stigma in that era associated with receiving charity.

Brunswick, 1978), 52-63, and *Minutes of the Pesticide Advisory Board Public Hearing*, vol. 2 (Fredericton: Government of New Brunswick, 1979), 30-48.

74. On the Reye's syndrome controversy and the activities of the Concerned Parents Group in the late 1970s and early 1980s, see Alan Miller, *Environmental Problem Solving: Psychosocial Barriers to Adaptive Change* (New York: Springer, 1999), 82-123, and Bert Deveaux, *'The Poison Mist': A Special Investigation into New Brunswick's Forest Spray Programme*, CBC Radio, originally aired 3 January 1982 (transcript).
75. Dunlap, *Nature and the English Diaspora*, especially chap. 6-9; Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, especially chap. 9 and 15; Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy*, especially chap. 13-16.
76. New Brunswick, *Annual Report of the Department of Fisheries and Environment* (Fredericton: Government of New Brunswick,1971), 9-10; New Brunswick, *Annual Report of the Department of Fisheries* (Fredericton: Government of New Brunswick, 1975), 8; New Brunswick, "Introduction," *Annual Report of the Department of the Environment* (Fredericton: Government of New Brunswick, 1976).

MacEachern, "Popular by Our Misery"

1. M. Brook Taylor, *Promoters, Patriots and Partisans: Historiography in Nineteenth Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1989), 74-5; Robert Cooney, *A Compendious History of the Northern Part of the Province of New Brunswick . . .* (Halifax: J. Howe, 1832). Versions of this chapter were presented at the annual meeting of the American Society for Environmental History and to seminar series in the departments of history at the University of Western Ontario and Dalhousie University; my thanks to the audiences for their many helpful comments. Thanks to two anonymous readers for their insights, Claire Campbell for her editorial acumen, and Jeannie Prinsen for being my most obliging reader, as always. I also wish to acknowledge the financial support provided by the Academic Development Fund at the University of Western Ontario
2. See, for example, Rebecca Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities that Arise in Disasters* (New York: Viking, 2009), especially 154-9, and Kevin Rozario, "Making Progress: Disaster Narratives and the Art of Optimism in Modern America," in *The Resilient City: How Modern Cities Recover from Disaster*, ed. L.J. Vale and T.J. Campanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 27-54.
3. Cooney, *Compendious History*, 62, 87-8, 84 (see also 104-5). On lumbering and agriculture in this era, see Graeme Wynn, "'Deplorably Dark and Demoralized Lumberers'? Rhetoric and Reality in Early Nineteenth Century New Brunswick," *Journal of Forest History* 24, no. 4 (October 1980): 168-87.
4. W.S. MacNutt, *New Brunswick, A History: 1784-1867* (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1963), 216; Judith Fingard, "The 1820s: Peace, Privilege, and the Promise of Progress," in *The Atlantic Region to Confederation: A History*, ed. Phillip A. Buckner and John G. Reid (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 267; Graeme Wynn, *Timber Colony: A Historical Geography of Early 19th Century*

New Brunswick (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 47; W.F. Ganong, "Note 90 – On the Limits of the Great Fire of Miramichi of 1825," *Natural History Society of New Brunswick Bulletin* 24 (1906): 410-18. I am reluctant to include in this discussion Stephen J. Pyne's *Awful Splendour: A Fire History of Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007) because his description of the fire (127-32) utilizes my unpublished manuscript "The Meaning of the Miramichi Fire." In his series of "fire histories" spanning the globe, Pyne has been an immense inspiration not only to historians wishing to explore fire as a topic of historical study, but to anyone working to understand and depict the culture-nature dynamic. *Awful Splendour* is an excellent introduction to environmental history in Canada.

5. Good entry points to this literature are Ted Steinberg, *Acts of God: The Unnatural History of Natural Disaster in America*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); and Christof Mauch and Christian Pfister, eds., *Natural Disasters, Cultural Responses: Toward a Global Environmental History* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009).
6. Cooney, *Compendious History*, 63, 80-6.
7. Matthew Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean, 1624-1783* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 193. The British allocation of £100,000 in 1831 was a highly unusual case, in which the citizens of Barbados and the Windward Islands invoked Parliament's even more extraordinary allocation of £120,000 following a 1780 hurricane. In 1812 the U.S. Congress gave $50,000 for provisions to assist sufferers of a Venezuelan earthquake, but this was the only case of officially sanctioned federal government foreign disaster relief for most of the 19th century. Mulcahy's discussion of British and American responses to 18th century natural disasters offers the most useful international context for the Miramichi case. There are few primary sources dealing with relief efforts in British North America prior to 1825, but see [Jonas Hanway], *Motives for a Subscription Towards the Relief of the Sufferers at Montreal* (London, 1766), and James Sabine, *A Sermon in Commemoration of the Benevolence of the Citizens of Boston, who, on Occasion of the Dreadful Fires of 7th and 21st of November 1817 in St. John's, Newfoundland* . . . (St. John's: printed for the author by John Ryan, 1818).
8. *A Narrative of the Late Fires at Miramichi, New Brunswick* . . . (Halifax: P.J. Holland, 1825), 10.
9. In discussion of the fire there would be vague references to previous disasters and relief efforts, but never to a specific case that served as a clear model or comparator.
10. *Narrative of the Late Fires*, 10-11.
11. See "Official Session," held at Chatham, 11 October 1825, RS13 (Provincial Secretary), file 32e/1825, Provincial Archives of New Brunswick (PANB). A more representative version of the same committee was formed later in the month; see *The Report of the Miramichi Committee appointed for the distribution of the subscriptions made for the relief of the sufferers of the Great Fire, on the 7th October, 1825* (Miramichi, NB: James A. Pierce, 1828).
12. *Free Press* (Halifax), 18 October 1825, cited in unknown newspaper, unknown date [1825], J.C. Webster collection, F452, New Brunswick Museum.
13. Earl of Dalhousie diary, 9 October 1825, *The Dalhousie Journals*, vol. 3, ed. Marjory Whitelaw (Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1982), 34.

14. See, for example, *Royal Gazette* (Fredericton), 18 October 1825; *New Brunswick Courier* (Saint John), 22 October 1825; *Gazette* (Quebec), 27 October 1825; *Canadian Courant* (Montreal), 29 October 1825; *British Colonist and Saint Francis Gazette* (Stanstead, Quebec), 10 November 1825; *Examiner* (London), 13 November 1825.
15. *Novascotian*, 2 November 1825. The pamphlet is generally credited to Nova Scotia publisher and historian Beamish Murdoch, although it was also said here to be "under the direction of a person who was an eyewitness to the scene." For the relationship between suffering and sympathy, see Karen Halttunen, "Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture," *American Historical Review* 100, no. 2 (April 1995), 303-34.
16. Isaac Paley to Mr. Dyson[?], 14 October 1825, CO188, vol. 32 (New Brunswick, Original Correspondence, Secretary of State, Offices and Individuals, 1825), Library and Archives Canada (LAC). Reprinted as "I.P.," *Times* (London), 16 November 1825.
17. *British Colonist and Saint Francis Gazette*, 10 November 1825, reprinted in *Canadian Courant*, 16 November 1825.
18. *Narrative of the Late Fires*, 7.
19. John Hill Burton, *The Emigrant's Manual: Australia, New Zealand, America, and South Africa (*Edinburgh: William and Robert Chambers, 1851), 41.
20. See *Narrative of the Late Fires*, as well as *The Report of the Miramichi Committee* and *Report of the Commissioners for Ascertaining the Losses Occasioned by the Late Fires in New Brunswick* (Fredericton: G.K. Lugrin, 1826). Specific donations and events mentioned here are from *Gazette* (Montreal), 2 November 1825; *New Brunswick Courier*, 29 October 1825; *Novascotian*, 2 November 1825; *Gazette* (Quebec), 14 November 1825; and *Herald* (Montreal), 5 November 1825.
21. Robert H. Bremner, *American Philanthropy*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), 40-3, 53-4. See also Merle Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1963).
22. *Gazette* (Montreal), 12 November 1825. Conversion from 1830 British pounds to U.S. dollars can be made at http://measuringworth.com.
23. *Albion* (New York), reprinted in *Canadian Courant*, 10 December 1825.
24. *Herald* (Montreal), 30 November 1825; and Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*, 13-14.
25. *Sentinel* (Eastport), 22 and 29 October 1825.
26. *Columbian Centinel*, 9 November 1825.
27. *Patriot* (Boston), reprinted in *Sentinel* (Eastport), 24 December 1825.
28. George Manners, *The Conflagration: A Poem Written and Published for the Benefit of the Sufferers by the Recent Disastrous Fires in the Province of New Brunswick* (Boston: Ingraham & Hewes, 1825). A different poem with the same name appears at the end of *Narrative of the Late Fires*. Manners's poem is discussed in Curtis Dahl, "The American School of Catastrophe," *The American Quarterly* 11 no. 3 (Autumn 1959): 380-90.
29. *Canadian Courant*, 10 December 1825.
30. *Centinel* (Boston), 9 February 1826, reprinted in *Courant* (Connecticut), 21 February 1826.
31. *Narrative of the Late Fires*, 37, 45.

32. *Caledonian Mercury*, 5 December 1825; *Times* (London), 17 January 1826.
33. *Times* (London), 12 and 15 November 1825. Such subscription campaigns had become common in Britain since the late 18th century. One observer noted: "There is scarcely a newspaper but records some meeting of men of fortune for the most salutary purposes." Cited in Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean*, 148.
34. Dafydd Amos, *Can Newydd yn rhoddi hanes am y tan dinystriol a fu yn Ngogledd America, Hydref 1825* (Jonathan Harris: Carmarthan, 1825), in collection of the National Library of Wales.
35. *Mercury* (Liverpool), 9 December 1825. The mayor, who had received some bad press for not calling a public meeting in advance of official word of the fire's scale, said he would not have opposed a grant of £5,000. Edinburgh had had its own "great fire" in November 1824, and there was discussion of sending surplus funds from that relief effort on to Miramichi. It was ultimately decided that this might set a bad precedent, making future charity drives more difficult. See *Caledonian Mercury*, 28 November 1825. On the Edinburgh fire, see Shane Ewen, *Creating the British Fire Service, 1800-1978* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 30-50.
36. *Aberdeen Journal*, 16 November 1825.
37. "The damage done to standing timber is considerable, and also to some already made," the *Greenock Advertiser* reported on 19 November. "As to the future supply, the present damage will not materially affect it. Wherever there was a belt or screen or hard wood, the progress of the fire was arrested." This assessment was atypically upbeat, one of just two sources I have found that was optimistic about the Miramichi forests' future following the fire. Reprinted in *Times* (London), 24 November 1825.
38. *Times* (London), 24 December 1825
39. Larry Neal, "The Financial Crisis of 1825 and the Restructuring of the British Financial System," *Review – Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis* 80, no. 3 (May/June 1998), 53-76. Nicholas Nickleby's father was the victim of such a bubble. That the *Times* (London), 23 December 1825, ran a short piece entitled "Origins of the Term 'Panic'" hints at the general financial mood. The *Caledonian Mercury* (3 December 1825) defended the director of the Bank of England, saying that if he were blamed for the current mania, he might equally "be accused of producing the Burmese war, or setting fire to the woods of Miramichi."
40. He noted the Colonial Office gave £1,000. See George Baillie to Howard Douglas, 16 December 1825, Howard Douglas papers, cited in notes of Professor Murray Young, University of New Brunswick, personal correspondence with author, 15 December 2003.
41. *Times* (London), 17 January 1826.
42. Word of the fire reached continental Europe about the same time it reached Britain. See Edward J. Jarvis, Malta, to John Boyd, Saint John, 19 January 1826, MG24 B13, E.J. Jarvis, "Chronicles of the Jarvis family," vol. 1, LAC.
43. On the broadening composition of the committee in its first weeks, compare Meeting, 11 October 1825, RS13 (Provincial Secretary), file 32e/1825 file, PANB, and *Report of the Miramichi Committee*, 3. The truce turned out only to be temporary, and by 1827 Chatham and Newcastle were rivals once more.
44. *Novascotian*, 14 December 1825.

45. *Report of the Miramichi Committee*, 12. In May 1826 those granted supplies were told to pick them up by 1 June, when the relief stores would be shut down for good. *Mercury* (Chatham), 23 May 1826.
46. *Narrative of the Late Fires*, 45.
47. *Report of the Miramichi Committee*, 14-15.
48. See Cunard to H.G. Otis, Boston, 21 November 1825, reprinted in *Canadian Courant and Montreal Advertiser*, 10 December 1825.
49. *Times* (London), 6 March 1826.
50. *Mercury* (Chatham), 2 May 1826.
51. *Report of the Miramichi Committee*, 16.
52. See minutes of meeting of Fredericton relief committee, 9 February, 20 and 21 June 1826, Delancey-Robinson collection, MG24 L6, vol. 1, file 1, LAC. The Fredericton committee threatened to publish the list of delinquents and noted that, eight months following the fire, the £30 subscription by Judge John Murray Bliss – of the same family as Henry Bliss, co-chair of the London relief committee – was yet to be paid. Subscription figures also muddy the waters as to how quickly the relief effort petered out: for example, if the citizens of a place immediately subscribed £200 and ultimately gave £200, it is not clear how much of the final amount came from the original subscriptions and how much from subsequent donations.
53. Delancey-Robinson collection, MG24 L6, vol. 1 file 2, LAC.
54. *Mercury* (Chatham), 28 February 1826. The precision of the numbers is not really to be believed. For example, 160 dead remained the standard figure for the Miramichi fire even after more bodies floated down the river with the spring freshet.
55. *Narrative of the Late Fires*, 43-4. The fire in Fredericton followed a 19 September fire that had destroyed Government House – the Miramichi fire was just one of a whole system of fires that burned the Northeast that year. Ironically, the reason the 7 October fire did so much damage in Fredericton was that the fire engines and most of the inhabitants were outside town fighting a fire that threatened Thomas Baillie's home.
56. A public notice appears, for example, in *Mercury* (Chatham), 14 March 1826.
57. *Report of the Commissioners*, 4-11 (quotation on 9). The report noted that some individuals did not come forward to report their loss (6) and that others came forward just to have their loss counted, but without any wish to obtain relief (9).
58. *Mercury* (Chatham), 18 July 1826.
59. *Novascotian*, 23 November 1825.
60. Remarkably, it would seem that decency even limited how much donors should give. According to the British Consul George Manners in Massachusetts, affluent Bostonians had been ready to send larger sums to the Miramichi but these were "very properly declined, by the Committee appointed to conduct the Subscription, lest their acceptance should have excited unpleasant and disadvantageous feelings in the bosoms of those whose means were not so adequate to the manifestations of their equally humane dispositions." The sensitivities of donors were apparently of greater consequence than the needs of recipients. See Manners, "Conflagration," 18.
61. *Report of the Commissioners*, 12.
62. Just two years later, British agricultural writer John McGregor passed through the Miramichi and noted that the fire "drove the actual settlers to the cultivation of

the soil for the means of subsistence; and since that time they have devoted their attention nearly with as much industry to agriculture as to the timber business.*" In the footnote, he recounted coming down the Southwest Miramichi River and being "astonished at the unexpected progress made during so short a period in the cultivation of the soil." See McGregor, *British America*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and T. Cadell, 1832), 262.

63. *Report of the Commissioners*, 4. The form that the Miramichi committee distributed for tallying the value of possessions lost included a line for manufactured timber. See Delancey-Robinson collection, MG24 L6, vol. 1 file 2, LAC.
64. *Report of the Miramichi Committee*, 23-4, 26.
65. "Jonathan," a letter-writer to the *Sentinel* (Eastport), later complained that no American living or working in New Brunswick at the time of the fire had received compensation. He did not understand why aid "should have been restrained to real *British subjects*." The Fredericton central committee believed this to be a "base calumny" that demanded refutation and compiled and published a list of American citizens who had received relief. The Down East grumbling may well have been the result of the New Brunswick fire having garnered so much more attention and aid than the same day's fire in Maine had – including from fellow Yankees. See *Sentinel* (Eastport), 7 July 1827, and *The Following List of Citizens of the United States who were Sufferers by the Awful Conflagration at Miramichi . . .*, 29 October 1827. This was also published in *Mercury* (Chatham), 6 November 1827.
66. Consider that the word "embarrassment" was used most commonly in this period in terms of economic hardship. So, for example, a Miramichi newspaper reported in 1830 that the region was "fast emerging from the embarrassing effects of that awful and destructive calamity." See *The Gleaner and Northumberland Schediasma*, 12 October 1830. Likewise, in a letter to the editor "Civis" blamed "our embarrassment" after 1825 as much on financial speculation as on the fire itself. See "Letter 6," *The Gleaner* (Chatham), 22 September 1829.
67. *Mercury* (Chatham), 14 November 1826.
68. Harry Peters, on behalf of William Murray, to H.G. Clopper, central committee, 6 October 1827, Delancey-Robinson collection, MG24 L6, vol. 1 file 1, LAC. Actually, Peters's petition is worded so that it is not entirely clear that the fire occurred on or about 7 October – or was even a forest fire.
69. Petitions of James Campbell, 7 May 1827 and Ammon Fowler, 19[?] May 1827, Delancey-Robinson collection, MG24 L6, vol. 1, file 2, LAC.
70. Ewing &c. v. M'Gavin, no. 331, *Cases Decided in the Court of Session from Nov. 12 1830 to July 9 1831, Scotland Court of Session*, Vol. IX (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1831), 622-4 (quotation on 622). It was apparently not just that the purpose of the donation had been fulfilled, but that so much had been raised elsewhere. The judge concluded that after such a disaster, "however large the contributions in other quarters may have been," it was still within the discretion of those to whom the charity had been given to determine its use. The case was cited as precedent in Scottish charity law through at least the 1840s. See *Highland Destitution: . . . Report of the Edinburgh Section of the Central Board of Management of the Fund Raised for the Relief of the Destitute Inhabitants of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, for 1848* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1848), 26.

71. Delancey-Robinson collection, MG24 L6, vol. 1, file 1, LAC (emphasis in original).
72. *Report of the Miramichi Committee*, 21.
73. Just how many millions is difficult to determine. The respected measuringworth.com permits comparison of 1830 British figures with those of 2009, but warns of the numerous ways one can make such a calculation. If attempting to determine the cost of a project such as the building of a bridge – or perhaps the rebuilding of a community – one might use a GDP deflator, in which case the 1830 £50,000 is equivalent to about £4,730,000 today. However, if one takes into account that the overall past economy was much smaller and calculates the earlier value in terms of its percentage of the overall (British) economy, the 1830 £50,000 is equivalent to about £144,000,000 today.

Duke and MacDonald, Bad Blows and Big Storms

1. NOAA/National Climatic Data Center, "Annual Report: Climate of 2005 in Historical Perspective" (13 January 2006), http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov. The 2005 hurricane season gave rise to 27 named storms, including the category 5 hurricanes Rita, Wilma, and Katrina, breaking the previous record of 21 named storms set in 1933.
2. In concluding a survey of storms for Long Island, New York, Norm Dvoskin issued a similar warning: "A law of nature is that there will always be a natural disaster greater than any previous one. . . . This statistically certain event can happen next year, the year after, or twenty years from now. . . . Lives will be lost and property ruined." See Norm Dvoskin, "A Weathercaster's Survey of Long Island's Climate and Historic Storms," *Long Island Historical Journal* 5, no. 1 (1992): 67-80, quotation at 78. In addition, currently operating General Circulation Models (GCMs) predict greater future variability and instability in temperature and precipitation regimes across Atlantic Canada. Climate projections for the North Atlantic region in the next century suggest rising annual average temperatures. The global climate projections also suggest the possibility of more frequent and more intense extreme storm events reaching Atlantic Canada.
3. For an analysis of two other particularly powerful storms that struck the Maritimes, see Edward MacDonald, "The Yankee Gale, the August Gale and Popular Culture on Prince Edward Island: a Meditation on Memory," *Dalhousie Review* 90, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 95-110.
4. Notwithstanding this, the relatively early date of the Saxby Gale still presents a challenge to historians attempting to study the event. See Alan Ruffman, "A Multi-disciplinary and Inter-scientific Study of the Saxby Gale: an October 4-5, 1869 Hybrid Hurricane and Record Storm Surge," *CMOS Bulletin SCMO* 27, no. 3 (June 1999): 67-73.
5. For a detailed discussion of this subject, see Morley K. Thomas, "A Brief History of Meteorological Services in Canada; Part 1: 1839-1930," *Atmosphere* 9, no. 1 (1971): 3-15.
6. "Atlantic Tropical Storm Tracking By Year," UNISYS Corporation, 2004, http://weather.unisys.com/hurricane/atlantic/. The Saffir-Simpson Scale is used to categorize hurricanes and tropical storms: a Tropical Storm is a cyclonic storm with sustained winds below 118 km/h; a Category 1 hurricane a storm with sustained