



The Face in the Mirror

Defining New Brunswick's people



presented by

Next NB/Avenir N-B

It is time for New Brunswickers to talk to each other. Our province and our region face some challenges, which means both must confront some difficult questions. Just as our nation seeks to redefine its role in the world economically, militarily and diplomatically, so too must New Brunswick's citizens decide for themselves their place in Canada.

Next NB/Avenir N-B will do that through a series of discussion papers it will release between February 2004 and June 2005. These papers will be supported by public forums held throughout New Brunswick and will culminate with a conference in Saint John.

Next NB/Avenir N-B will be a bilingual project to reflect New Brunswick's nature and its distinction as the only officially bilingual province in Canada.

***Next NB/Avenir N-B* is a unique opportunity to explore what New Brunswickers think about themselves, their province and its place in Canada and the world.**

Please join us in the conversation.

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The triple crème cheese could have been the showstopper but instead it was just the opening act as the residents of Caraquet welcomed their guests to the table. It was the gala grand tasting for the seventh annual FestiVin, the wine and cheese festival held in this small fishing community on the northeastern corner of New Brunswick. With glasses in hand, the patrons sipped their wines and savoured the carefully selected cheeses and patés – a Bleubry cheese to accompany the port, a paté de campagne was matched to a merlot – as the sun slowly set over the Baie des Chaleurs.

The FestiVin began as a way to highlight good French wines during the larger Acadian Festival. But like other good ideas it grew from there and last year it stretched over nine days, drawing people to Caraquet to sample wines while they admired the view of a late day sun reflecting off the fishing boats moored at the nearby quay.

There are events like FestiVin and communities like Caraquet all over New Brunswick. Places that welcome us in and make us feel that we belong. Coffee shops and tea rooms. Restaurants and bars. Theatres and reading rooms. Church suppers and strawberry socials. These are the places where we go to kick back, to think and to have fun. These are also the places where we tell our best stories.

Employment rates and the gross domestic product may be indicators of New Brunswick's economic progress but neither begins to define who New Brunswickers are or what they want to accomplish. The essence of New Brunswick will not be found in any ledger. We must look to ourselves, its citizens, and examine our perceptions of the place and of each other. We must cast a critical eye on the view and determine whether what we see is the reality of what New Brunswick has become at the dawn of the 21st century or if we sometimes choose to see what once was because there is comfort in reaching for the old and the familiar.

New Brunswick is home to men, women, seniors, young people, Aboriginal people, francophones, anglophones, straight, gay, African-Canadians and other visible minorities, Roman Catholics, Baptists and other faiths. They are our faces, the faces of New Brunswick. To shape this province we first need to

understand who we are and then we must examine how we choose to define ourselves.

The primary conduit for that are the arts – literature, music, theatre, dance, visual arts and crafts. It is our writers, our artists and our musicians who are our primary storytellers. Through their work they reflect our faces either by challenging us with new viewpoints or be reinforcing established images.

As we chart New Brunswick's future, we must consider the face we present to each other and to the world – the ethnic, gender and generational makeup of New Brunswick - and our mirror - the arts - which reflects back to us who we are and, if we allow it, projects what we can become.

Who are we?

New Brunswick displays its history in the faces of its citizens. The province is dominated by people who trace their origins back to the British Isles, France or the original First Nations. According to the 2001 Canadian census, 415,810 out of 729,500 New Brunswickers identified themselves, at least in part, as Canadian. This was followed by French (193,470 people), English (165,240 people), Irish (135,830 people) and Scottish (127,630 people).

In comparison, 1,355 are Jewish, 1,320 are East Indian and 10 are Afghan. A century ago, the picture was remarkably similar. In 1901 New Brunswick had a population of 331,120 people. Within that, 237,524 claimed a British ethnic origin, 79,979 claimed French and 11,309 were Native peoples.

New Brunswick, with its heavy concentration of British and French descendents, can no longer claim to be a microcosm of Canada. It is the face of our country's past. But each of us has more than one identity. Gender, class, age and faith also contribute to our perceptions.

New Brunswick's business and political elite is largely middle-aged Caucasian men. They are not representative of the face of New Brunswick, where women represent 51 per cent of the population. Women have had the right to vote for 85 years but New Brunswick has only elected five women to the federal House of Commons, four in the last 11 years. Provincially, 25 women have been elected to the Legislative Assembly. In the June 2003 provincial election, seven women were elected to the

55-seat assembly, the same number elected in 1987. The makeup of the province's governing and financial class also doesn't reflect the attitudes of the community they often invoke when talking about the need for transformational change – the province's young people.

A strong society is one that gives voice to various perspectives and which designs public institutions that encourage rather than impede the access of groups and individuals to the people in power.

Why are women underrepresented in New Brunswick's political arena?

Is it indicative of their representation in other aspects of our society?

What venues do young New Brunswickers use to explore ideas?

How do we seek out new voices?

Do you see your face in New Brunswick's mirror?

Where does it start?

By understanding that New Brunswick's story has more than one perspective and how you view this province depends on where you are standing. Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqewiyik (Maliseet) have a complicated relationship with the rest of New Brunswick. They are the original inhabitants but their history has been interpreted through a highly biased cultural lens. Their story is the struggle for survival in the face of European, and later, Canadian expansion. While the days of residential schools and Indian agents may be gone the feelings of inequity linger, particularly in a province where Aboriginal voices are not always heard. The end result is Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqewiyik people desperately trying to reconnect with their culture.

Today, few can speak their ancestral languages and traditions aren't understood or practiced. Reviving both is critical to the future development of New Brunswick's Aboriginal peoples. But within that story of healing and revival lies a critical debate; are Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqewiyik people a part of New Brunswick society or are they a society apart? An answer is far from apparent.

For example, Thomas (T.J.) Burke, a lawyer and a member of the Wolastoqewiyik community of Tobique made history last spring, becoming the first Aboriginal person elected to the

provincial Legislative Assembly. Beyond that, recent court cases have awarded Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqewiyik a greater role in the region's natural resources sectors, local Aboriginal governments are seeking greater control over local concerns and there is a growing feeling of nationalism. As the powers of language and tradition take hold in Aboriginal communities it will fall to the next generation to decide their place in New Brunswick.

The struggle for survival is well-known to francophone New Brunswickers, particularly Acadians. Like the Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqewiyik, the Acadians' history is one of survival. As a minority, Acadians have struggled to maintain their language and traditions within a province dominated by anglophones. At the heart of this struggle is *le grand dérangement* - the expulsion of over 11,000 Acadians by the British between 1755 and 1762. In the 1880s the Collège St-Joseph in Memramcook was a driving force behind the establishment of some of Acadia's enduring symbols. Resisting the urge to adopt Québécois motifs, the group chose a distinctly Acadian anthem (*Ave Maris Stella*), a motto (*L'union fait la force*), a flag (the familiar tri-colour with the Star of Mary) and a national holiday (August 15, the Feast of the Assumption).

In 1960 Louis J. Robichaud became New Brunswick's first elected Acadian premier and ushered in an era of dramatic change for the province. He introduced Equal Opportunity, a transformative program that centralized health and education services, ensuring rural New Brunswick received an equitable share of the province's financial resources. Mr. Robichaud also transferred the Collège St-Joseph to Moncton and created the Université de Moncton. In educating francophones, the Université de Moncton has been instrumental in cultivating a strong sense of self in New Brunswick's francophone community and the Acadian community specifically.

But there is more to francophone New Brunswick than Acadia. The Brayons of northwestern New Brunswick see themselves as a distinct community within the larger francophone society. Le Foire Brayonne, the annual festival held in Edmundston, celebrates different stories than the ones memorialized during the Acadian national holiday. And then there are francophones who have relocated here from Québec, francophone communities in Canada and other francophone countries, including France, illustrating that a shared language does not always dictate a shared culture.

That is certainly the case in anglophone New Brunswick. Of the 83 ethnic origins that call New Brunswick home, the majority has opted to converse in English. But under that umbrella diverse cultures have gathered. Even before the Loyalists arrived in the early 1780s, New England Planters, Yorkshire English, Scots and Irish had settled in the area. And the Loyalists were a diverse lot, including Dutch, Huguenot, English, Scots, Irish and African Americans, both slave and free. They were followed by other groups such as the Lebanese in Saint John and the Italians in Minto.

There is one other group that must be considered; the English-speaking Quebecers, Ontarians, Westerners and Newfoundlanders who have come to settle here. New Brunswickers have a special term for them – the ‘come from aways’. The expression is light-hearted but it holds a deeper meaning - that only born-and-bred New Brunswickers can every truly understand this province. It is a conceit that must be reconciled if New Brunswickers seek a lasting transformation for their province.

What are the repercussions of the Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqewiyik debate over their place within New Brunswick?

What role and responsibilities do institutions play in defining a society?

How well have francophones and anglophones communicated with each other?

How have the smaller communities within the two main language groups defined their place within, and their influence upon, New Brunswick?

How do we get there?

By examining how we express ourselves. If the cultural arts truly reflect the mores, attitudes and ethnicity of a community, it is obvious that New Brunswickers see the world through different lens. Officially bilingual since 1969, New Brunswick is far from bicultural. For example, musicians, particularly those who adhere to folk and roots music, sing about very different struggles and triumphs, depending on where they live and the language they speak. The folk tradition of the Miramichi is very much about a specific time and place, such as the song about the great fire of 1825.

Then it passed to Black River, where it did burn sixty more;

*So it forced its way with fury till it reached the briny shore.
Forty-two miles by one hundred this great fire did extend;
All was done within eight hours, not exceeding over ten.*

Songs like these bring us back in time and give us an understanding of our history. But what of our future?

Given the chance great art can also help us visualize where we are going. It is a society's artists who are often the heralds of change, giving voice to emerging ideas through their written words, their canvases and their songs. Through their work they give shape and form to these intangible thoughts and as it settles into the community and begins to capture the imagination of others, it can inspire us to act. Visit a gallery or pop into a small bar and you will see and hear modern New Brunswick. For instance, the recent Acadian renaissance may be rooted in the community's folkloric past but the images are new, borne from a strong sense of community and a newfound confidence in its ability to survive. This modern 21st century Acadia did not take its cues from some distant community; it did not import its solutions. Instead it turned inward, examined itself and conceived a modern identity that fused the cumulative stories of its past with its contemporary aspirations.

We can take our cues from the Acadian renaissance as we consider New Brunswick's future. Rather than import ideas from somewhere else, we must consider what lies at the heart of our province and imagine a vision that is uniquely ours.

Why is a pan-New Brunswick identity so difficult to discern?
How should New Brunswick reflect its future?
What are New Brunswick's key historic images?
Do we have any shared cultural symbols or stories?

What do we want?

To celebrate and to challenge each other. Our artists, writers and musicians can do that but we must ensure the tools are there to support them. How we do that is quite simple: we buy their art. To do that, our citizens need greater access to New Brunswick's cultural works. The New Brunswick school system can help accomplish that by teaching our children how to recognize art. It starts in literature classes, by ensuring that New Brunswick writers are on the reading list and continues through New

Brunswick history classes. Antonine Maillet's *La Sagouine* and Hereménégilde Chiasson's *Climates* illustrate the struggle over the Acadian identity just as Alden Nowlan's *Bread, Wine and Salt* and David Adams Richards' *Mercy Among the Children* instruct us on the ways of those New Brunswickers who exist on the fringe. It continues in fine arts and music where qualified teachers are needed to instruct students on the technical requirements of drawing and painting.

Access to the cultural arts is also important because New Brunswick artists do not exist in a vacuum. They must vie for our attention on a very crowded stage that is dominated by popular entertainers. Private radio, television, newspapers, magazines and the Internet all promote popular culture. Somewhere in that milieu local talents have to find room to perform, which isn't always easy in a province so far removed from Canada's entertainment centres in Montreal and Toronto. Which is why we must cultivate our professional artists. To do that there must be a payoff. Individually we can attend their shows, read their works and buy their CDs but we need leadership to guide the development of the arts. Provincial institutions such as the New Brunswick Museum and the Beaverbrook Art Gallery must design programming that reflects the true state of the provincial art scene.

The provincial government's Culture and Sports Secretariat oversees the development of the literary, musical and visual arts scene. In 2002/03, the secretariat had a budget of \$10.2 million, \$2.4 million of that earmarked for arts. That funding was distributed to, among other things; 58 projects to help increase awareness and participation in artistic activities, 35 arts organizations and associations for training, 31 cross-cultural projects between New Brunswick and Quebec, 19 arts festivals, 18 professional arts organizations, 15 artists-in-schools projects, 14 arts organizations trying to reach rural communities, nine community art associations and two professional artists' associations. With so many projects, how is it possible for government funding to have an effect?

It is time to reconsider how we promote the arts in New Brunswick. For example, why not set aside some money each year to commission a piece of public art? This would accomplish three things; it would employ an artist and provide affirmation that a person can make money in the cultural sector, it would give the public greater access to art and it would promote New Brunswick's local artistic community by putting it on display.

If writers need readers and artists need walls, our musicians need performance space. New Brunswick has lovely theatres but these aren't exactly designed to rock a crowd. Thanks to computer technology and the Internet young musicians are able to record their songs, burn CDs and promote themselves on discussion boards and personal websites. But technology can't replace the thrill of a live performance and New Brunswick has very few band-friendly venues, particularly for audiences under the age of 19.

The celebration of our artistic accomplishments is the pervue of all. Private corporations, community groups, small entrepreneurs or any level of government; it doesn't matter who steps forward. What is important is that someone does.

- What are the characteristics of New Brunswick's artistic scene?
- How can we improve access and understanding of the arts?
- What is the role and responsibilities of private industry, media and government?
- What is the function of provincial cultural and artistic institutions and organizations?

Why?

Because we have a story to tell. Acadian contralto Anna Malenfant knew that and she told it through song. So too did people such as Bliss Carmen who found inspiration for his poetry just outside his window and Mi'kmaq artist Roger Simon who somehow captured on canvas the ever-ephemeral spirit. It continues today through the dance of Igor Dobrovolskiy and the Atlantic Ballet Company, the ballads of Roch Voisine, the pottery of Flo Grieg, the photography of Freeman Patterson, the arias of Measha Bruggergosman and Wendy Nielsen, the rifts of Chris Colepaugh and the Cosmic Crew, the folksongs of Edith Butler, the poetry of Anne Compton and the raps of Red Suga. Our artists offer us their mirrors and if we are willing to look we will see the cumulative influences of race, class, gender, age, region, language and history. They give expression to dreams and the unspoken emotions that lie beneath. Theirs is a voice that cannot be forgotten as we begin our conversation. Nor can we forget the faces that look to be reflected in New Brunswick's image. This province is home to more than one viewpoint and we must listen to the disparate voices of our citizens. If we are to

transform our province, we must respect and understand our past, identify the spirit and motivations that moved New Brunswick through the years and listen and welcome the new voices that will guide it in the future.