

tion of the legalities and economy of empire.

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Daniel Samson, *The Spirit of Industry and Improvement: Liberal Government and rural-Industrial Society, Nova Scotia, 1790-1862* (Montreal: McGill Queens University Press, 2008).

In this excellent work, Daniel Samson explores the conflicted emergence of liberal modernism in nineteenth century Nova Scotia. The book is a fascinating exercise in political economy, combining a firm understanding of economic activity with the evolution of policy, institutions and attitudes towards economic change. A sub-theme of the book is the tendency of the poor to treat resources as common property and the conflicts that emerged as wealthier parties claimed the resources as their own private property.

Samson's focus is rural. He supports earlier arguments that Nova Scotian rural society was economically diverse. Some prospered, some fared poorly, occasionally very poorly indeed. The failure of the potato crop in the 1840s resulted in intense hardship among the poor, particularly in Cape Breton. More generally, the limited quantity of good quality land and its uneven allocation among settlers played a large role in creating the hierarchy of the countryside. The passage of time failed to diminish the inequalities apparent at the early days of settlement.

Merchants were an essential part of the rural economy, purchasing agricultural goods and timber from farmers while selling them imported goods. The merchants possessed economic power; they could choose to carry families through hard times or to sue in court for unpaid debts. Suits allowed some to acquire large quantities of farm land.. Merchants also possessed political power, less by securing office than by their influence on office holders. They were not reluctant to branch out from trade into mining, shipbuilding and the promotion of manufacturing as opportunities appeared.

Mining was another rural activity that Samson examines. In early years, grindstones were an important export. At first, poor settlers treated the quarries as common property, but cooperated to manage access. Samson traces the process that led to the 'enclosure' of these resources by the more well-to-do. Mineral rights in coal had been claimed by the Crown, and the state exerted more control of these resources than of grindstones. Initially, a few simple mines were established that produced sufficient coal to supply the garrisons in Halifax and Newfoundland, although in defiance of government regulations, settlers often dug coal from coastal outcrops or from seams on their own land.

Coal was 'enclosed' when the General Mining Association established well