History from the Inside: Prolegomenon to the “Memoir of Harold Adams Innis Covering the Years 1894-1922”

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Abstract: This essay provides an introduction to Harold Innis’ autobiographical memoir covering the years 1894-1922 (www.cjc-online.ca). Consideration is given to sources that may have inspired him in this direction. They include the memoirs and autobiographies he cites in The Bias of Communication (1951), along with the diary-based studies of three individuals that he wrote in conjunction with his staples research in political economy: Peter Pond, Alexander James McPhail, and Simeon Perkins. Innis’ own memoir is assessed as a document that can help us further understand how the scenarios of his early life influenced his character, motivations, and eventual career choices.

Résumé : Cet article fournit une introduction aux mémoires autobiographiques d’Harold Innis portant sur les années 1894-1922 (www.cjc-online.ca). Pour ce faire, je prends en considération les sources qui ont pu l’inspirer dans cette direction. Celles-ci comprennent les mémoires et autobiographies qu’il cite dans The Bias of Communication (1951), ainsi que les études sur trois individus—Peter Pond, Alexander James McPhail, et Simeon Perkins—qu’il a écrites sous forme de journal dans le contexte de sa recherche en économie politique sur les produits de base. J’évalue les propres mémoires d’Innis comme document qui peut nous aider à mieux comprendre comment les scénarios du début de sa vie ont influencé son caractère, ses motivations et ses choix de carrière éventuels.

Keywords: Harold Adams Innis; Communication history; Autobiography; Biography; Political economy

It was an age when one took up with fanatical enthusiasm one thing after another.
—Harold Adams Innis

Few academics and even fewer social scientists write autobiographies. Only a handful acquire the requisite fame that would make any of us interested if they did. However, the fact that Harold Innis (1894-1952) made overtures in this direction, coupled with his stature in Canadian and now world intellectual history,
should be of considerable interest. Whether or not he intended to publish the memoir (made available at www.cjc-online.ca) will perhaps never be known. He began writing it with a sense that his mortal flesh was failing and was only able to give us an account of his life up to 1922.

The memoir is an exercise in self-portraiture. It highlights those events and individuals of his early years that resonated significantly in his personal rear-view mirror. Yet the account is not without conventional scholarly interest, since it covers the period in which he completed and submitted for publication his first major project, *A History of the Canadian Pacific Railway* (1923), and ends with a glimpse of the research direction to follow that would yield *The Fur Trade in Canada* (1930), his magnum opus in economic history.

Whatever his plans were for the memoir, it is evident that the writing is more lucid than anything he scripted for academic purposes—not a page-turner, perhaps, but few of you who start reading will not want to see where the next moment of his life will lead. Of course, a fuller sense of the man emerges than we find in secondary literature, but we also get a unique glimpse into the times lived and places experienced during his first quarter century.

No doubt some may see this text as the unexpected indulgence of a scholar known on one end of his intellectual trajectory for the rigorous fact-mongering of his economic studies, and on the other end as a macro-theorist of history having an almost continental European sensibility that recalls a tradition running from Hegel and Marx, through Spengler, to Foucault. Nevertheless, it could be argued that there is a facet of Innis’ formal academic research underscoring the memoir. Clearly discernable in his later work, it has received little if any attention from the burgeoning cottage industry of Innis commentary. He considered the epistle, memoir, and especially the diary as revealing sources for understanding history—a way of glimpsing it from the inside. For example, in his most theoretical work, *The Bias of Communication* (1951), he cites, if you will pardon the shopping list to follow, some surprisingly unconventional sources:

- Thomas Constable’s *Archibald Constable and His Literary Correspondents* (p. 13);
- Harold Spender’s *Fire of Life: A Book of Memories* (p. 60);
- Brand Whitlock’s *Forty Years of It* (p. 79);
- John Maynard Keynes’ *Two Memoirs* (p. 80);
- W. R. Inge’s *Diary of a Dean* (pp. 80, 133, 141, 206);
- The *Journals of André Gide* (p. 81);
- George Gissing’s private papers of Henry Rycroft (p. 83);
- Norman Hapgood’s *Changing Years: Reminiscences* (pp. 83, 204);
- E. L. Goodkin’s Reflections and Comments (p. 83);
- The *Letters of Ezra Pound* (p. 84)—there is no evidence that Innis ever read Pound’s poetry, despite McLuhan’s efforts to show him its importance;
- Further Excerpts from the Notebooks of Samuel Butler (p. 139);
- The *Autobiography of Leigh Hunt* (p. 155);
- J. H. Harper’s I *Remember* (p. 174);
- Melville Stone’s Fifty Years a *Journalist* (pp. 178, 179);
- E. P. Mitchell’s *Memoirs of an Editor* (p. 185);
- Mark Pattison’s *Memoirs* (p. 194);
- Cyrus Redding’s Fifty Years’ Recollections (p. 194);
- The *Journal of Sir Walter Scott* (p. 195);
- Frederick Harrison’s *Autobiographic Memoirs* (pp. 205, 206); and
- A. M. Thompson’s *Here I Lie* (p. 207).
It is difficult to imagine anyone concerned with historical pattern and process on a broad canvas making use of so many personal sources. The above list includes figures obscure and long forgotten, along with several, such as Sir Walter Scott and Ezra Pound, who defined their eras and have gone on to be revered by subsequent generations. It does not include the numerous biographies Innis also utilizes. For someone to shift, as Innis did, from sourcing hard-nosed data, such as ledgers revealing the number of spikes, ties, and rails used in the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, to the memoirs of poets represents quite a leap. J. David Black (2003) has argued persuasively that wife Mary Quayle Innis’ humanist sensibility may have inclined Harold in this direction.

Perhaps Mary also encouraged him to contribute to the very genre that was proving so useful to his later researches, thus giving us this personally and historically revealing memoir. However, before commenting on it further, a few observations might be in order regarding three of Innis’ earlier and largely neglected diary-based studies. They explore the role of the individual history, or history from the inside, in intriguing ways and may have, along with the above sources cited in *The Bias of Communication*, provided inspiration for his own foray into memoir writing.

**Three staples, three players**

Peter Pond, Alexander James McPhail, Simeon Perkins. Hardly well known names, even in academe, save among a handful of Canadian historians. However, they were important players in the economic history of three staple resources integral to the development of the country—fur, wheat, and fish. All three were also diarists. Innis believed that their reflections were significant enough to warrant serious study and eventual publication under his editorship.

**Peter Pond (1740-1807)**

The same year Innis published his momentous *Fur Trade in Canada*, he also brought out a more modest and largely overlooked companion volume, *Peter Pond: Fur Trader and Adventurer*. Innis saw Pond, who hailed from Milford, Connecticut, as a significant but largely overlooked figure in the economic history of Canada. Pond was instrumental in contributing to the success of the North West Company and was the first white man into the Mackenzie Basin. However, he was not part of the company’s Scottish-born inner circle and, according to Innis, had enemies who suppressed his legacy. Alexander Mackenzie—a major figure in the name game of Canadian history—was one.

Pond’s chances for posterity were also hurt by his lack of formal education and what Innis calls his “illiteracy.” Semi-literacy might be a more appropriate term. Pond wrote with full cognizance of the alphabet, but gives the impression he was not sufficiently well read to make the leaps of faith necessary for proper English spelling. It may also be, as was sometimes the case in colonial times, that Pond’s orthographic originality was the result of acquiring literacy when an adult. As a result there is both an oral and an aural quality to his writing. Perhaps Innis found this appealing. We can almost imagine Pond’s voice in our mind’s ear when
reading “lake Mishegan…. We sun imbarkt … beaing destatute myself … convars with other tribes nor inter-marey….,” et cetera (Innis, 1930, p. 36).

In writing this way Pond created the impression that he was, to borrow Robert Fulford’s term, an “unreliable narrator” (1999). As a result, the bulk of his journal was destroyed, with the remainder largely overlooked until Innis unearthed it in the 1920s while doing archival research on the fur trade. His attempt to resurrect Pond through an evaluation of Pond’s journal is more than a compilation of curious eighteenth-century observations. It is an attempt at doing what could be called redemptive biography. In 153 cut pages with two-inch margins, plus maps, Innis stitches together an overview of Pond’s life using the journal entries to illustrate his own biographical running commentary. It is an unusual literary format, almost seamless, with Pond’s prose, which is marked off by quotation marks, and its inherent idiosyncratic spelling, interwoven with Innis’, both between and within paragraphs.

Innis is fascinated by where Pond went and what he did, as well as with the man himself. We get glimpses of his service in the American colonial army fighting the French and Indians: “Befour we had capterd the fort the Gennarel had gind the arme and himself and my frend Col. Johnson ware both kilt in one day and Col. (Thodey) shot throw the leag” (Innis, 1930, p.13). As a fur trader dealing with various First Nations groups, Pond “was always an anthropologist,” notes Innis (1930, p. 36). He respectfully cites numerous ethnographic observations from the journal, such as “Thare amusements are singing, dancing, smokeing, matcheis, gameing, feasting, drinking, playing slite of hand, hunting, and they are famous in Mageack” (Innis, 1930, p. 37).

Innis concludes his study with an assessment of Pond’s character and achievements, strengths, and weaknesses. He also tells us—and the approach is more fashionable now than when Innis wrote—that even those less educated and less privileged can yield chronicles that are well worth the historian’s consideration. Although Innis may have been the first to reassess Pond’s legacy, he would not be the last. Several studies of Pond have been done since. There is even a Peter Pond Society, and not surprisingly, a Web site. It should also be remembered that in researching the history of the fur trade in 1924, on location as it were, Innis traversed—in one instance by canoe—one of the routes followed by his predecessor. His own journal even contains a number of observations similar to those of Pond. Unfortunately he died before he could integrate them into the autobiographical memoir reprinted here.

**Alexander James McPhail (1885-1937)**

During the 1930s Innis followed fur with fish and embarked on a decade-long research odyssey that would culminate in 1940 with the publication of *The Cod Fisheries: The History of an International Economy*. Note his use of the phrase “The History of,” whereas his study of the Canadian Pacific Railway is “A History of.” No false bravado was intended in the case of the former. Its scope and detail are overwhelming. Perhaps Innis thought that it would not soon be surpassed—if so, he was right. Yet during the years leading up to its publication, he further
honed his staples research by doing a number of other case studies, most notably of lumber, mining (especially for coal, iron, nickel, lead, zinc, and copper), and wheat.

The research on wheat involved an examination of the co-operative movement in Western Canada and the establishment of the wheat pools. A major participant in this segment of Canadian history was Alexander James McPhail, who kept an extensive journal beginning in 1919. (It was later rendered into typescript by McPhail’s widow.) Apart from some minor details involving McPhail’s personal life, Innis published the rest of the document as *The Diary of Alexander James McPhail* in 1940—the same year he released *The Cod Fisheries*. The diary meticulously chronicles the wheeling and dealing, impediments, and compromises that McPhail faced. Innis himself provides a preface, introduction, and conclusion, along with introductions to the nine chapters preceding the conclusion. He also offers paragraphs of commentary in the text, along with footnotes, both of which help contextualize many of the entries and clarify points of transition. It was a daunting labour given the enormous detail it contains—on everything from agricultural output to the exchanges that took place in various meetings. Again, as was the case with his reassessment of Peter Pond, Innis became a de facto biographer.

In presenting McPhail’s words, Innis’ approach is primarily chronological, but due to the complexity of the subject matter some of the chapters are organized by topic. He first became aware of McPhail’s work when travelling to Western Canada in the 1920s. Further interest (one suspects a few brief personal encounters at that time, but Innis is never explicit on this) arose when McPhail lectured at the University of Toronto in 1927. McPhail’s assiduous labours on behalf of the co-operative movement obviously impressed him. However, for Innis to undertake editorship of a document as detailed as McPhail’s diary, there must have at least in part been an interest and curiosity in the man himself. Evidence for this certainly suggests itself from some of the following observations:

Innis quotes from an uncited source that describes McPhail as someone who “loathed cynicism, smartness, and pomposity in equal degrees. He admired brains and respected honesty…. It was difficult for him to unbend physically or mentally … no use for cards in any form, or any time-wasting pastimes except conversation” (Innis, 1940, pp. x-xi). Innis himself observes (whether from first-hand acquaintance or not is unclear) that McPhail “had a strong sense of humour … as well as a hard agnostic bent of mind which resisted emotionalism and made imposition difficult…. He disliked publicity… He read widely, and particularly biography…” (Innis, 1940, pp. x-xi).

Given what we know about Innis, these observations would be equally apropos if applied to him. They suggest that he identified (whether consciously or subliminally) with McPhail’s character and personality. In addition, both men had Scottish ancestry and a rural, farm-based upbringing around the turn of the century, McPhail in Manitoba, Innis in southwestern Ontario. Both enlisted in the war, but while Innis served and was wounded, McPhail was consigned to the
domestic militia. Not surprisingly, the style and tone of the passages in which Innis writes about McPhail seem remarkably similar to parts of the autobiographical memoir he would draft 12 years later. And as readers will discover in that memoir, Innis spent the summer of 1915 on the Prairies—in Landonville, Alberta, as a teacher; being part of that community, he also worked on local farms, thereby acquiring first-hand experience in wheat production.

The two men died prematurely, McPhail at 47, Innis at 58. Of McPhail’s death, Innis notes that he was not destined “to see the promised land” resulting from his labours on behalf of the co-operative movement (Innis, 1940, p. 265). The same could be said regarding Innis’ later pioneering work in communication studies, which helped set the so-called “Toronto School” in motion. In his earlier work in political economy, Innis wrote about the tensions that arise between the centre of a nation and the staple-producing margins. In his work as a policy consultant to various government commissions he often made a plea for a more equitable treatment of those margins. McPhail was at the front line of this struggle, an involvement that Innis helped make part of the public record through his editorship of the diary.

Simeon Perkins (1740-1807)

As it was with fur and wheat, so it was with cod. During the course of Innis’ researches, history became more than facts and figures involved in the rise and fall of markets and struggle between the centre and margins. These were only the constraints, rather severe ones to be sure, in which real individuals such as Simeon Perkins made choices. Those choices did not change the course of history, but they certainly shaped its character. Marx understood this. We know Innis read him. But whether or not he read Marx’s supreme treatise on an individual player in history, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (1852), is not certain. It opens with one of the most famous passages in all of Marxiana: “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past” (Marx, 1852/1959, p. 15).

Perkins was a businessman involved in the historical circumstances of the fish trade—an industry that had been crucial in the exploitation and settlement of eastern North America. His diary provided Innis with source material for The Cod Fisheries, his first international study. The book cuts a wider swath through history—four centuries—than anything Innis had written up to that time. In it he chronicles the rivalries that erupted both between and within nations, along with the changing nature of the markets that induced this competition.

Eventually, a source he drew from for this study became his subject, and in 1948 he published the first volume of a proposed five-volume compilation (the remaining volumes were edited by others) of The Diary of Simeon Perkins. It is somewhat different from the two previous diary/biographies Innis undertook. He is not concerned with Perkins’ life as a whole, only those years relating to Perkins’ work in Nova Scotia. Perkins, a Connecticut Yankee from Norwich, kept an enormously detailed account of his life and activities. The Nova Scotia period that con-
cerns Innis is chronicled, with gaps, from 1766 to 1780. Innis provides a 34-page introduction and footnotes throughout, but there is no conclusion, nor are there commentaries between the entries, as we find in his studies of Pond and McPhail.

For Innis, the document is important for two reasons: first, because of the “contribution of Perkins and others from New England in strengthening the position of Nova Scotia, the latest of the colonies as an outpost of Empire” (Innis, 1948, p. xxxii); and in terms of the broader canvas, he notes that from “the diary of Simeon Perkins, the vast complex of Atlantic trade can be traced and to some extent understood” (Innis, 1948, p. xxxiii).

The contemporary term “player,” which has been used in the title of this section, is especially applicable to Perkins. In partnership with his brother and brother-in-law, he invested in a schooner and ventured profitably into the fish and lumber trade; however, he was less successful as a leather broker. Along the way he became a lieutenant colonel in the Nova Scotia militia. The diary indicates that he had an eastern North American trading network that extended to the West Indies. During the American Revolution Perkins still managed to move goods between Nova Scotia and New England. (Although American privateers were a constant menace, General Washington rejected invading Nova Scotia on the grounds that it would be an act of conquest, not defence.) Perkins’ entrepreneurial resilience in the face of numerous obstacles, not the least of which was the Revolution, earned Innis’ respect.

Ploughshares and textbooks
Having edited three memoirs and read and appreciated numerous others, it was now Innis’ turn. In the summer of 1952, recovering from cancer surgery, Innis began the autobiography accessible at www.cjc-online.ca. Peter Pond had also started his memoir late in life, at age 60—perhaps from memory, since it is not certain whether he kept a field journal during his travels. Although the latter part of Innis’ account—the period beginning with his sojourn at McMaster University—makes use of letters he sent home, the early years appear to have been sketched from memory. His recall is unusually acute. Perhaps the disease that ravaged him, as is sometimes the case, made vivid his early childhood recollections. Lessons learned from his earlier editing of McPhail’s and Perkins’ diaries appear at times to have guided his account. Like McPhail, he can be candid while still being guarded—for example, we learn about his anxieties as a student and teacher, but find out nothing about his romance and marriage to Mary Quayle, to whom in 1919 he would write, “Both of us can move mountains” (Black, 2003, p. 113).

As the early parts of the memoir reveal, Innis was a child of the soil, not the polis. This would later make him a rarity in academe. Even McLuhan (1911-1980), who claimed a frontier pedigree by virtue of being born in Edmonton and raised in Winnipeg (he also had a nostalgic fascination with the agrarian Southern United States), never worked the land. South of the border, the (mainly Jewish) European émigrés who did so much to establish American social science were mostly from urban ghettos. A major exception to this trend was the great maverick economist Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929), a product of Minnesota’s Norwegian-
Lutheran farming community. Veblen went on to have a brilliant and scandalous academic career, part of it at the University of Chicago several years before Innis arrived there. Innis greatly admired Veblen, and several months before the notorious economist’s death, wrote an appreciation: “The Work of Thorstein Veblen” (Innis, 1962).

Innis describes the family farm near Otterville in some detail in the memoir, but not its location in wide geographical space. Toronto is 90 miles to the east; Cleveland the same distance south across Lake Erie; and Detroit is located 120 miles west. Visiting the region where he grew up today, we still find farmland interspersed with old-growth forest. The primary difference between then and now is the larger size of the farms currently operating. The town of Otterville has long since ceded its importance to centres better able to serve the interests of large agricultural operations. It remains a sleepy burg, catering to retirees. A walk in the park overlooking the lake reveals a reminder of Innis’ origins there: his name on a monument commemorating those residents of the township (Norwich) who served in World War I.

In reading Innis’ memoir, we inevitably carry into that reading what he might call a “bias.” Events that take place in a person’s early years are seen as foreshadowing the directions and career choices that would emerge later. Readers familiar with Innis will no doubt discern instances of prefiguration, and several will be pointed out shortly. They are part of what makes a document like this so intriguing. Yet a few things we see in his early years seem to have minimal bearing on where his life would lead and suggest alternative futures never pursued. For example, although he barely mentions science when discussing his schooling, his observations concerning the habits of domestic and wild animals are most astute. The experiment with the ferret is perceptive as well as humorous, and his account of the actions of his sick horse would fascinate animal behaviourists. These passages suggest a budding Darwin and a possible career in biology or animal husbandry, rather than political economy.

Throughout the memoir we get a sense of his self-discipline, a trait he would manifest his entire life. Not the best of students at first, he always applied himself to the full, be it at the one-room schoolhouse in Otterville or at Woodstock Collegiate, where he attended senior high school. The commute to Woodstock was daunting. As the school was located 20 miles to the north, he had to walk several miles to Otterville to catch the Grand Trunk Railway to Woodstock, then walk another mile to school. Today, still located where they were then, we find an expanded version of the old railway station serving Woodstock, now a small city that bills itself as the dairy capital of Canada, and a rebuilt version of Woodstock Collegiate.

After struggling early in his program at Woodstock, Innis eventually became what we would call a “B” student—probably a higher achievement then than now. So committed was he to succeeding that he wrote his public examination while afflicted with measles, as was his mother, who had pneumonia as well. He was never passionate about the sports played at school, but we learn that he did find...
one to make his own, to which he diligently applied himself. Inspired by the great Onondaga runner Tom Longboat, who hailed from the Six Nations Reserve near Brantford and won the Boston Marathon, young Herald (the name on his birth certificate—he would not become Harold until he attended McMaster University) took up long-distance running in 1911. This foray into physical self-discipline ended when he left for university.

McMaster University was a Baptist institution located at that time in Toronto. His experience there recalls what occurred at Woodstock Collegiate: early struggle and alienation followed by modest success. Eventually he earned prizes in economics and philosophy while at McMaster. Innis had earlier taught on a temporary certificate at his old one-room elementary school, and the McMaster training allowed him to teach more advanced students in Alberta during the summer of 1915. The experience also made him aware of the East-West/centre-margins division of the country. At this point in his memoir there is no indication that teaching would become his vocation. Law and the Baptist ministry seemed to be the most likely options. A career in the Church does seem a bit puzzling, especially in light of the agnosticism to come, but the work ethic and austerity of the Baptist faith remained with him throughout his life.

**From battlefield to lectern**

The memoir gives little explanation as to why he decided to enlist. Elsewhere, in a letter to his sister written at the time of his enlistment, he regarded the war in Europe as a moral cause: “If I had no faith in Christianity, I don’t think I would go” (Creighton, 1978, p. 31). By the time he wrote his memoir that faith had virtually disappeared, being replaced by something that we might today call secular humanism. Prior to the imposition of conscription, young men of his age were expected to serve. Always one to finish what he started, he did manage to delay his enlistment until successful completion of his final exams, thereby turning down the offer of a degree sans exams that was being made to early enlistees.

The war provided a double shock to his sensibilities: that of battle, plus the harsh treatment “colonials” received from those in the British military. Reflecting back on the latter experience, he wryly notes that the “treatment of Canadians and all others by officers and non-commissioned officers sent out from Great Britain must have been an important factor in hastening demands for autonomy throughout the commonwealth” (1952). Still, the situation could have been worse, as Australian troops found out at Gallipoli.

Innis served in the signal division of the infantry artillery, learning Morse code and semaphore. Often called the first modern war, World War I was also a veritable compendium of the history of technology, using everything from horses to aircraft for transportation and carrier pigeons to radio for communication. Innis’ awareness of this was perhaps a harbinger of the work he would undertake as a media historian during the last decade of his life. What he experienced in battle, however, was more immediate. The descriptions he provides seem unemotional, almost deadpan, which makes them no less chilling. We learn, for example, that the discomfort of mud induced by winter rains proffered a mixed blessing—
it absorbed artillery shell fragments far more effectively than dry ground, thus limiting their lethal range.

He knew whereof he spoke, since it was on dry ground July 7, 1917, at the battle of Vimy Ridge, that an artillery shell ended his combat experience. A damaged leg resulted. It could have been much worse were it not for a bit of situational luck described in the memoir. He convalesced in England and this gave him the opportunity to reflect on many things. He wrote letters home, several of which appeared in local newspapers, and travelled to Ireland, providing us with an engaging account of that experience. Having time and the inclination, he began studying for his master’s degree at McMaster while recuperating. Part of that preparation entailed writing a thesis, “The Returned Soldier,” that over the years has intrigued Innis commentators with its subject matter. But none of us has ever seen it, since no copy appears to have survived. In any case, the memoir indicates that he did not think highly of the work, although it did help earn him the degree.

Upon his return to Canada, Innis again notes that his options appear to have been law or the ministry. No compelling reasons are given for either. Law seemed the favoured choice, perhaps because of his involvement and success in debating while at McMaster. He also felt that before he followed any career path he simply had to learn more about economics. No doubt he was still, and always would be, haunted by the maxim uttered by one of his beloved McMaster professors, W. M. Wallace, “that the economic interpretation of history is not the only interpretation but is the deepest interpretation” (1952). Since Innis had just experienced one of modern history’s most malevolent eruptions, he might have thought a study of economics could provide some answers as to why; more likely he seems to have rationalized it to be a valuable supplement to a career in law. Regardless of the reasons, the subject interested him immensely.

He elected to go to the University of Chicago for a summer course, which soon turned into full-time enrolment in the PhD program. The Osgoode Hall law program, where he was registered for the fall, went on what would become permanent hold. At Chicago, teaching again became part of his life, and coupled with research, set him on his future course. It was a heady milieu, and as he indicates, an inspiring one. Chester W. Wright and Frank Knight were his two primary mentors. Under their tutelage he produced a dissertation on the history of the Canadian Pacific Railway, which would become a book in 1923. He had always had a fascination with trains, first regionally, then nationally. He had travelled to school by rail, and as he indicates earlier in the memoir, preferred the smoking car, not because he imbibed, but because of the “picturesque characters” and their stories, many involving the railway. A sense of the importance of the railway to the country as a whole was imparted to him during his Alberta teaching experience in 1915. Now he could study how this came to be—and gain employment from so doing.

Last stop in the memoir, the department of political economy at the university of Toronto.
There were other academic options, as he reveals. Unmentioned is the fact that for two decades after the period covered in the account, Chicago would repeatedly make him offers he could not refuse, but did. At Toronto he seems to have found his milieu, although the next few years would bring an academic skirmish or two. He worked diligently at his teaching and even travelled to Europe, visiting places that only several years earlier had been cauldrons of combat. The memoir ends in 1922 or early 1923, with the CPR study in press and the fur trade project on the horizon. It tells us a great deal about the man, but with the remaining thirty years of an extraordinarily productive life unavailable to us through his eyes, not nearly enough.

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Notes
1. Like Innis, Foucault (1982) has edited a memoir and used it to inform his historiography.
2. Page references are to Innis (1951/2003).

References

