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Making Friends & Enemies: Public Relations at Memorial University College, 1925-1950

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Abstract

During its first quarter-century, Memorial University College, established in the 1920s, seems to have been particularly adept at skilful manipulation of public relations. The principal method was advertising made believable in the guise of news, published at regular intervals in the daily newspapers. Only very few criticisms of the college, concerning allegedly inadequate science or an allegedly disloyal professor during wartime, were broadcast, and those that were publicized were easily deflected. Judging from the published histories of other Canadian institutions, Memorial took more pains than were common elsewhere to carefully regulate and safely navigate the potentially difficult gown/town intersection.

“More Earthquakes on the 27th”

(Headline of a newspaper item announcing a seismics lecture in November 1929, a few days after the tidal wave disaster on the Burin peninsula.)

“In the name of decency ... keep Sleggs locked up or send him back to Saskatoon to further experiment upon the anal glands of the gopher.”

(Arthur English, no admirer of Memorial’s biology department, to J. L. Paton, 30 April 1927.)

At Memorial College in pre-confederation Newfoundland, patterns in curriculum, staffing, and external affiliations were very similar to those that prevailed in other parts of the Canadian higher education system. Patterns in public relations, however, show an interesting difference. Memorial at St. Johns—like Dalhousie at Halifax, Mount Allison at Sackville, and other institutions across the country—was anxious to be a co-operative and helpful partner in a wide range of gown/town interactions. It therefore made its facilities (library, auditorium, athletics venues) available to off-campus individuals and organizations, provided expertise to government, and offered cultural advantages to the public through extension services.¹ This was a very common posture. Where Memorial rather excelled was in the publicity aspect of public relations.² To a much greater degree than the Canadian norm, the Newfoundland college invested energy and skill into using media both to create favourable opinions in the general public and to counter occasional whispers of criticism.

1. College Notes

The first president of Memorial, J. L. Paton, began a deliberate campaign to attract interest and support for the infant school. Circulating news about the school's undertakings and interests in local daily newspapers, the column "College Notes" was the principal method. Albert Hatcher, who succeeded Paton in 1933, continued this initiative through the 1940s. Informal yet sophisticated accounts of college proceedings won many friends for the infant institution. On the other hand, some of the feedback that returned was definitely not fan mail.

Authorship

In 1925, Paton invented "Memorial University College [MUC] Notes." Through the medium of the most popular newspaper in St. John's—the *Daily News*, which also had a healthy circulation across the island—Memorial shared its aspirations and experiences. This journalism/propaganda was not left to chance or to any volunteer arrangements. "Every week some student is told ... to write "College Notes" for the *Daily News*."³ How consistent was the scheme of coerced volunteers, or how long it lasted, is unclear. Authorship was very rarely indicated in what appeared in print, and no copies of the weekly manuscripts have survived from the period. What can be ascertained, however, is that rotating the writing of the column soon changed to the responsibility of a few individuals.

A letter which Paton received from a former student in late 1928 threw a little light upon the early years of the column. Chesley Howell, a former student, had moved on from Memorial to Hillview, Trinity Bay, where he was a United Church lay minister with two sermons per week to prepare and fourteen schools to help supervise while busy "visiting, baptizing, marrying and doctoring." From his letter, it is clear that Howell wrote most of the "Notes" published the previous year, 1927-28. He remarked that, in the most recent notes, he could discern chiefly the president's own work, and perhaps some contributions from student leader Audrey Sterling (Paton 1928 [24 October]). No doubt, much depended upon whether the student body happened to contain individuals with sufficient enthusiasm and writing skills to carry the work off effectively. Probably Paton, who after all knew best most of what was going on at the college, took on the duty himself more and more as time passed.

In 1933, when Paton retired after eight years as president, the *Daily News* eulogized him warmly. The paper said that many of his works were of "super erogation" [*sic*], beyond the call of duty, and rendered valuable service to the college, Newfoundland, and the *Daily News*. The Land Development Association—a private group urging the government to sponsor new agricultural settlements—had received Paton's help. Paton organized evening college classes for working adults who could not afford to study full-time, and, without qualification, it was indicated that Paton wrote the *Daily News*' weekly column on the university college ("Hail and Farewell" Editorial, 17 April 1933, 4).

During Hatcher's presidency, "College Notes" continued, often at twice-monthly rather than weekly intervals. To know for sure who wrote the column seems impossible. Michael Harrington welcomed the opportunity when he was a student in the mid-1930s. Once or twice, the "Notes" showed signs of being composed by a committee with various students contributing a news item each. Perhaps, however, the university president often just polished up jottings he had made for a college or summer school assembly and submitted them for publication.

Origins

Before considering the range of information and likely impact of the “Notes,” we can ask where the idea may have originated. One possibility is that Paton transferred to Newfoundland a method of publicity he had used successfully in England as head of Manchester Grammar School for twenty years up to 1924. That institution’s published history, however, does not mention a regular column in the public press, and no such item was carried in the Manchester *Guardian* in the early 1920s (Graham and Phythian 1965). Nor did Canadian universities of the time contribute a running narrative to their local paper.⁴

Was there a journalistic tradition peculiar to St. John’s that Memorial followed? This does not seem to have been the case either. During the academic year 1924-25, the *Daily News* had no regular items from the church colleges—residential high schools—which at the time were the closest things to a university in Newfoundland. The very first “MUC Notes” (*Daily News*, 7 November 1925) appeared on a page headed “What City Schools are Doing To-day.” Reports were printed from Saint Bonaventure’s College and Bishop Field College as well as Memorial, complete with an editor’s note hoping the page would become a weekly feature (9).

One is left suspecting that the whole project resulted from Paton’s initiative. He likely thought it would be prudent for a new, somewhat controversial institution to build interest and support by circulating news of its activities. Indeed, there are other indications Paton was very sensitive to matters of reputation and profile, even to the extent of advising a full year’s delay in one student’s academic progress to ensure one of Memorial’s own won a certain scholarship.⁵ The other city schools maintained their contributions to the page of college news for just a short time, while Memorial continued publishing its diary for public consumption until well after the Second World War.

Content

With the usual seven to nine items within each article, the “Notes” showed that a wide variety of interesting activities were underway at the university college and that an important community was emerging. A 1930 *Daily News* column (8 November) was somewhat fuller than usual but had a typical range of topics.

1. Debate between Normal School and MUC (won by Normal)
2. Science Club meeting: Professor Reginald Harling spoke on X-ray photography
3. The whole student body attended the Casino theatre for *As You Like It*
4. Track team information
5. Women’s hockey: Memorial vs. United Church College, United won
6. List of fruit prices in Hamburg
7. Gifts of books acknowledged
8. Late store hours interfering with adult night classes
9. Evening class researching Newfoundland’s economy
10. Evening biology course: how to feed a large family on a small farm
11. Former students: Reverend T. Short, first Memorial graduate ordained to holy orders.

The index to a 1935 column included other matters: a notice about musical entertainment at the regular weekly assembly of the college; the death of a student; a special lecture; library “books of the week”; an art exhibit; household science class tea; and, in nearly every set of “Notes,” news of former students, inelegantly tagged with an awkward label drawn from the English prep school tradition, “old Memorial’s” (*Daily News*, 25 May 1935, 10).

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The “Notes” serves as a valuable diary of college life. One striking feature, quite different from student experience sixty years later, was the numerous research and social outings. In just a three-year period of columns spanning the Paton-Hatcher regimes (1930-33), one notices:

- engineering students to Witless Bay to see electricity generated
- botany class to Bowring Park
- biology class to a marine laboratory at Logy Bay
- geology class to Manuels for trilobites
- organic chemistry class to the Newfoundland Butter Company Factory
- engineers on a visit to the freezer ship *Blue Peter*
- Empire day hike to Oxen Pond (alternative activity in a college which made games and outings compulsory for all students: gardening on the College grounds)
- 2 hiking club outings
- gardening at Government House in preparation for summer school program in agriculture
- bobsled party
- and each year the annual picnic held in the week before graduation. All recent years of former Memorial students were usually represented, home again from further studies at Halifax, Sackville, Montreal, and elsewhere. (*Daily News*, 29 November 1930; 16 May, 27 June, 17 October, 7 November 1931; 27 February, 5 March, 28 May 1932; 11 November, 2 December 1933)

Most of the activities, of course, were indoors and studious rather than outdoors and active. Each number of “College Notes” mentioned one or more recent special lectures, sometimes by faculty members, often by visiting experts. In the early 1930s, for example, Memorial students heard lectures about: the manufacture of iron and steel; Bell Island ore; astronomy (a favourite of President Hatcher, mathematician and former navigation instructor in the Royal Naval College of Canada at Halifax and Esquimalt, 1911-22); the history of Newfoundland—not yet part of the curriculum; the psychology of mental abnormality; nitrogen as the destroyer of life; the reservation of forests; and the relation of the earth to the rest of the universe (a modest half-hour). There was no end of special talks on heroic lives of the intellect, general culture in counterpoint with the history of science, Cowper, Priestly, Charlemagne, Galileo, and T. S. Eliot (*Daily News*, 6 December 1930; 2, 30 May 1931; 21 November 1932; 25 February, 21 October 1933; 5 February, 21 April, 10 November 1934; 2 February 1935).

The first assembly each Fall featured an address from the president inviting students to uphold and cherish college traditions, and history professor Alan Fraser developed an impressive annual performance explaining “academic dress, its use, sartorial elegance and history” (*Daily News*, 10 October 1931). Since the university was a community of scholars, occasionally each member helped to educate the others; the lecturer would be a student. In 1930, Cecil Scammell spoke to the literary society on “The Life of a Fisherman”; in 1931, Eli Lear lectured on “The Study of Words.” That same year, the science club heard from R. Strong about his summer job at the Bay Bulls Research Station, and, in 1933, H. B. Hayo, future Rhodes scholar, discussed, complete with film, “Methods Used in Iceland for Handling and Curing Fish” (15 November 1930; 24 February, 31 October 1931; 20 May 1933).

Students were the leaders again when debates, usually under the auspices of the literary society, were held. Some topics expressed traditional undergraduate rivalries: “... Medical Research Has Done More for Mankind than Engineering” (“Nays” won). Some were twentieth-century subjects that never go away. “Capital Punishment Should Be Abolished.” In 1931, the “Nays” triumphed, but, three years later, it was the “Yeas” (*Daily News*, 14 February, 7 March 1931; 24 February 1934). Some debate topics concerned current Newfoundland issues. The prospect of selling Labrador to Canada was so hot in 1931-32 that

the literary society debated it twice. Nationalism triumphed both times: Labrador should be retained (30 January 1931; 13 February 1932).⁶

Most interesting to later generations, and perhaps to the general public at the time, were debates that grappled with tense issues of international affairs. A 1934 public debate, which attracted an audience of 200, was “Universal Free Trade Would Be of Greater Benefit to the British Empire During the Next Ten Years than Would a System of Imperial Preferences.” Biology professor J. S. Colman took the affirmative, Alan Fraser the negative, and each were sided by a leading St. John’s lawyer (R. Gushue and C. E. Hunt respectively). Justice W. J. Higgins was chairperson. The audience voted quite strongly in favour of empire-knitting tariffs and preferences, the count 122-58. In Spring 1935, Memorial’s literary society challenged the pre-law students to debate “Germany was Justified in Repudiating the Versailles Treaty,” after warming up with an earlier struggle over “Hitler is Making an Indispensable Contribution to German Welfare,” in which the affirmative side triumphed (*Daily News*, 1, 6 December 1934; 4 May 1935, 10).

Fairly frequently, armed conflict was the subject called to the corporate attention of the college. This was appropriate in an institution occasionally referred to as “War Memorial University College.” The years 1931-32 should have been a quiet lull in martial pre-occupations, long after the Great War and before the period of frantic diplomacy that led into the Second World War. No matter how profound the peace, however, conflict was still warmly remembered in this outpost of empire. In January 1931, Professor Jack Hogg (chemistry) gave the college literary society his “memories of a machine gunner.” The following month, Professor Fred Sleggs of biology recounted his experiences. Come March, it was Hogg’s turn again, lecturing on the battle of Arras and his own bravery, for which he received the military cross. The following winter, a visitor lectured on the Royal Naval Reserve (*Daily News*, 24 January, 28 February, 21 March 1931; 23 January 1932). Every year, one of the most meaningful pauses in the life of the college came on November 11th, when all paraded in cap and gown to St. John’s other war memorial on Water Street, remembering those who served and those who fell.

Other frequently occurring subjects in the “College Notes” are the exploits of Memorial College teams—they usually lost; and the further triumph of former students, who may have left the old college but never left it behind. No theme was more constant in college assemblies or the newspaper “Notes,” however, than the progress and achievements of Newfoundland-nurtured scholars of whom all could be proud. The publicity given to their names makes it possible for a history of Memorial College to be a history of the students as well as of faculty and the institution. In just a three-month period in 1931, for example, *Daily News* readers were welcomed to share Memorial’s pride in Chesley Howell and his \$50 scholarship at McGill; Jessie Mifflin becoming president of Mount Allison’s debating society, while L. Hawco started up an international relations club there; Edith Moore winning a silver merit award from the Royal Life Saving Society; and Wilfred Templeman leading his invertebrate zoology class at University of Toronto (*Daily News*, 7 February, 14, 21 March, 12 April 1931).

Throughout Memorial’s entire college period, the fledgling university shared its interests and activities with readers of the *Daily News*. By the mid-1940s, the “Notes” once more appeared at weekly intervals. The principal themes were still uplift and enlightenment, pursued in an interesting fashion. For example, 9 March 1945:

- Newfoundland’s Auditor General speaking on boys’ clubs in Britain
- International Relations Club discussing “Merits of Commission of Government”
- Muriel Hunter lecturing on art to the arts and science society
- an engineering “smoker” featuring piano, games, and a talk on refrigeration
- a discussion of “books of the week,” the college library’s table display of new acquisitions (which by this time had become a regular “Notes” feature).

A regular feature over the decades, “Notes” must have won many friends, or at least interested bystanders, for Memorial. The tone of the “Notes” was often very appealing. Scholarship was presented as a serious business, yet fun to pursue. In dealing with various less exalted aspects of college life, with charming modesty, the “Notes” renounced any claim to pretension. For example, a writer would describe the good time had by spectators during games at which Memorial’s teams were defeated if not demolished. In a discussion of skid marks on polished corridor floors, only faculty members were held innocent: “they alone preserve the stately tread of the Victorian days” (*Daily News* 12 November 1932, 6).

The most impish humour, probably Paton’s own, was the *Daily News*, 23 November 1929, a few days after Newfoundland’s south coast was tragically washed by a tidal wave. “More Earthquakes on the 27” read the heading. One expects that readers were meant to scurry to safety. The item told that the college had received numerous telephone calls inquiring about the science of such natural upheavals. Ever responsive, Memorial was pleased to announce that all questions would be answered next Wednesday evening in a public lecture in the assembly hall, and to be also broadcast by radio. “Nature may supply illustrations during the lecture. Professor Hogg will supply knowledge. Mr. R. F. Horwood [student] takes the chair.” The anonymous writer gives his own advice for handling these harrowing possibilities. Live everyday as though it were your last. “Go to bed and see that you plant yourself in the middle.”

2. Public Criticism

Memorial was not successful in monopolizing newspaper discussion of its ongoing activities. Nevertheless, scandals and attacks were few and far between. This Newfoundland account has nothing to rival in enormity the most famous episodes of bickering which make the histories of some mainland universities, unfortunately, so much more interesting to read now than to live through at the time. Memorial had no mass resignations with or without clandestine interception of mail, no presidential breakdowns, nor any politically motivated witchhunts against radical faculty members. Every once in a while, however, criticisms were published, and the institution temporarily became a subject of controversy.

Arthur English

Early Memorial had a no more constant critic than Arthur English. Aply persuasive in dispute and fighting best when he fought alone, English was the harrier of the early days. He was a native of St. John’s and in his mid-40s when Memorial opened. After a youthful stint at journalism in the United States, he took up agriculture in western Newfoundland, served as geologist/taxidermist with the 1910-11 Canadian Arctic Expedition, then spent some time helping map out railway lines in northern Ontario. By 1913, he was back on the west coast and made the first of two unsuccessful attempts to be elected to the House of Assembly as a Liberal member. By the 1920s, he had returned to St. John’s, supporting himself chiefly by journalism and writing. He told the *Who’s Who* in 1927 that recreation included “excursions in pursuit of natural history subjects (235; Canada 1910, 5, 6, 37, 42, 83; Madden and Hodgson [1967] 1981, 779). He seemed to see himself as a crusader and national champion, defending the interests of true science against foreign charlatans who pawned themselves off on unsuspecting Newfoundland as experts. High on his do-not-trust list was J. L. Paton.

In 1926, Memorial’s British president inaugurated summer school for teachers with his usual flourishes of publicity. Everything was marvellous, proclaimed items carefully crafted for the public print, especially the vigorous nature study conducted by Francis Bruton, Paton’s former colleague from Manchester Grammar School. Arthur English was not impressed. At the end of summer school, he wrote to the *Evening Telegram* about the recent avalanche of scientists into the region and how, childishly, Newfoundland expected too

much of them. English thought that the teachers had been too impressed by Bruton's nature rambles. Their admission, he pointed out, "that they had been tramping all their lives on pretty flowers and never troubled to know even the simplest thing about them is not complementary to Newfoundland that could tolerate such ignorance in her teachers." English thought the teachers probably exaggerated to flatter the professors. "The spirit of surrender to the stranger in the matter of intellect is rather too pronounced among us, and this disposition to rely on the supposed transcendental qualities of the foreigner is responsible for a lot of our disappointments" (*Evening Telegram*, 1926 [7 August], 12).

This undisguised attack upon summer school apparently triggered a response, not available in the Memorial archives, from Paton. English subsequently rebutted that Paton had misinterpreted his letter to the editor, without malice, it seemed, but he thought the "mean, cowardly, stupid" defence put up by the *Evening Telegram's* editor (not published) was a different matter (Paton 1926 [12 August]).

English's next target was Memorial's first professor of biology, Fred Sleggs. Paton authored a strong press release when Sleggs arrived the previous summer, boasting of his previous investigations at University of Saskatchewan and the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at La Jolla, California. Sleggs was to be jointly employed and paid by the college and the Newfoundland government's Department of Marine & Fisheries, personifying the potentially significant role that research at Memorial could play in the resource-based economy. Once Sleggs was in place and in action, English was emphatically not impressed. He wrote the college president, attacking his "attempt to pawn off on this country as a scientist of repute a gentleman who is a four-flusher of the most perfect type." English thought it a shame and indignation to see Sleggs' latest pamphlet, *Preservation of Fish by Salting*, published by the Newfoundland authorities. "A more grossly stupid thing I have never seen. In the name of decency, quit your miserable game and keep Sleggs locked up or send him back to Saskatoon to further experiment upon the anal glands of the gopher" (Paton 1926 [September]; 1927 [30 April]).

The critic then went public with a letter published in the St. John's *Commercial Annual*. Despite his criticism, English took a modicum of satisfaction in Newfoundland having finally acquired at least a part-time fisheries researcher. "This is a triumph as far as it goes, as it opens a breach in the walls of indifference and prejudice, but the triumph is tinged with disappointment in that the biologist engaged is fanning the air and making no hits." According to English, all of Sleggs' three pamphlets published so far: *Smoke Cure of Fish*, *Cause and Prevention of Pink Fish*, and the salting study mentioned earlier, duplicated findings already known and published. He gave precise references. Thus Sleggs had nothing "new or interesting" to contribute. The "role of fault finder is not a pleasant one," English apologized, but the "critic is as necessary to the helpful conduct of public matters as the white corpuscle is to the blood. He may appear troublesome, but it is only by keeping ward above the conduct of public affairs can we hope for improvement or resist decay" (*Commercial Annual* 1927 [10 May]).

In correspondence to the college, English commented on an account of Slegg's summer research, which Paton had sent him: the report was quite interesting but the work was sloppy. Sleggs "over looked the fact that the compression of the air in his jar must have raised the temperature of the water very considerably. How much involves a simple mathematical calculation" (Paton 1927 [30 May]). The next Memorial-connected publication with which English found copious fault was Francis Bruton's 1928 edition of W. E. Cormack's famous *Narrative of a Journey Across the Island of Newfoundland in 1822*. Bruton was drawn to this important nineteenth-century document of Newfoundland natural history while teaching nature study in the 1926 and 1927 summer schools. He performed a labour of love on the long out-of-print text, had it published in London, and arrived for the 1928 summer school with sufficient copies to give one free to every teacher enrolled. The book was dedicated "To the girls and boys of Newfoundland" (Cormack 1928).

While others praised Bruton's initiative and generosity, Arthur English spent July going through the book with a critical eye. One day in the first week of August—Bruton had not yet returned to England—English

sent letters to both the protégé and his protector. He wrote Bruton that he opposed the use of Cormack's journal in the schools because Cormack was no scientist. Bruton himself, he continued, was not much better, making many mistakes—as many as fifteen—in the glossary of geological terms. “Not one definition in the whole glossary but might be amended. It is a pity you did not get the help of someone who knew—he might even be a *native*.” He emphasized the point in his letter to Paton: Bruton's “many botanical and ornithological errors are a bit revealing.... not so clever a man as he would make believe” (Paton 1928 [5 August]).

One of Paton's reactions to this onslaught was to dash off a brief review introducing the work and its excellent qualities to a wider audience through the medium of the *Toronto Globe*. He never stopped praising Bruton nor did he push Cormack's troublesome travelogue, but he also attempted to make peace with Arthur English by inviting him to lecture that fall on Captain Cook. English declined with thanks because he was busy in politics and proposed Paton could do him a greater compliment as a Newfoundlander by getting Cormack's journal removed from the school curriculum. “No deference to the age of Dr. Bruton can be or should be an excuse for foisting this horrible tissue of errors on us” (Paton 1928 [13 October]).

By now, English's list of mistakes found in Bruton's edition had grown to sixty-three items. English submitted them to Paton, two and a half pages of small writing. English wrote that Cormack just did not recognize accurately many of the features he tried to describe. Not noticing many of Cormack's errors, the editor Bruton failed to correct them while adding quite a few of his own. Cormack could not have seen a lady's slipper at the sand pits in the 1820s. It took a weak grasp of geology in the 1920s to call agate a crystalline rock (Paton 1928 [13 October]).⁷

In the Bruton/Cormack controversy, English seemed too cutting a critic: nothing short of perfection would do; he was firmly determined to find fault. Bruton defined agate as “a crystalline form of silica usually showing concentric coloured rings” (Cormack 1928, 128). To twenty-first-century expertise, this, while somewhat vague, is not incorrect. Reading the English diatribe and list of errors, one could get the impression that Bruton naively copied whatever Cormack had done and put it back into circulation in unscholarly fashion. A close look at Bruton's edition, however, reveals otherwise. To 114 pages of Cormack's text, Bruton added a respectably scholarly thirty-two additional pages comprising two introductions, four appendices and thirty-seven notes. To make a school book out of this old account, he took some bold, thoughtful liberties with the text. He buried passages full of Cormack's historical errors in appendices, so that children would not be confused by reading statements at variance with what they learned in other lessons. Cormack's original ten chapters were carpentered into seventy-nine short sections with new titles. In his appendices and notes, Bruton spotted six errors Cormack had made, while he gave specific praise on five other occasions. Bruton actually took a balanced editorial approach, not the blind, uncritical acceptance which English intimated.

English presumably thought that all aspects of natural science mentioned in the text should be reconciled with the very latest knowledge. Bruton, however, was often satisfied not to know, as Cormack did not know, while posing questions that could encourage pupils to begin thinking and investigating. English did not sufficiently appreciate how Bruton, as a teacher, would likely prefer questions to answers. “As Cormack saw the twillick, we should have expected that he would see round the lakes the spotted-sandpiper or beachy-bird, and the king fisher; or do these birds migrate earlier than the twillick?” (Cormack 1928, xviii, 138).

As long as President Paton remained at the college, Arthur English continued finding fault with his scientific common sense. The most fullblown controversy yet erupted in the newspapers in February 1932. Dr. Harold Thompson, previously senior naturalist to the Fishery Board for Scotland, had become Director of Newfoundland's new Fisheries Research Station at Bay Bulls. In the last week of January, he began a series of public lectures on marine biology, sponsored by Memorial and staged in the assembly hall. English immediately wrote the Scottish scientist, taking him to task for weakness in some of his paleontological comments. English was “... surprised to find a Biologist who is not even superficially acquainted with that

division of geology from which the history of life upon the earth must take its datum. I am painfully obliged to say, Sir, you are not dealing with this question in the straightforward manner of the real scientist" (*Daily News* 28 January 1932, 3; 28 January, 4; Paton 1932 [2 February]; MacLeod 1985, 31).

English carried his struggle into the *Daily News* (1 February 1932) with an article ("Criticizes Biological Statement") asserting that Thompson made several errors in his lectures. He listed a number of these mistakes and let it be known that he had informed the editors of the city papers and Paton that in this Scottish scientist Newfoundland seemed to have got hold of another fraud. The funds devoted to the Bay Bulls research effort would be wasted, he warned, because the type of information Thompson was setting out to gather was already known and published.

While these kinds of criticisms were seconded by some of the opposition members in the House of Assembly and the St. John's Board of Trade, Thompson had plenty of defenders. Captain George Whiteley wrote that Newfoundland was behind the times because of lack of scientific knowledge, so Thompson's labours were needed. Another letter, anonymous, said that if English had actually attended Thompson's second lecture he would have realized that apparent errors in his spoken presentation were corrected and explained in the slides used to illustrate his talk. Memorial's Professor Sleggs wrote "In Defense of Biological Station" and the *Evening Telegram* editorialized, "Why Impede the Wheels of Progress?" The editor said that in matters which Newfoundlanders would not do for themselves—in this case fisheries research—they needed to get outsiders like Thompson to help (*Daily News* 1 February 1932, 3; 2 February 1932, 10; *Evening Telegram* 2 February 1932, 6).

Seventy years later, our interest is not with scientific accuracy or otherwise of controversial complaint and counter, but with Memorial's public posture. It was wholly on the side of the scientific establishment. After the flurry of letters, pro and con, came the regular weekly column of *College Notes*. No doubt, Paton wrote this column himself. He dismissed English as "a Daniel come to judgement." One supposes readers were meant to remember that Daniel stood alone, not that he was proven right. Newfoundland's marine biology research effort was no sooner set up, Paton wrote, than some people wanted to pull it down. Arthur English opposed research because he apparently thought he knew everything already. Others criticized the cost. "We have not heard these gentlemen uplift their voices against the money spent on drink, tobacco and other hurtful things. But when it comes to knowledge, it really is more than they can stand" (*Daily News* 6 February 1932, 5).

English immediately wrote Paton protesting against his treatment in the *College Notes*. As he saw it, he had caught both Professor Sleggs and Dr. Thompson in error and said so in the interest of truth. The result was he became "the target for the silliness of that fellow" (the author of the *Notes*) "who aspires to be the arbiter of what is science and what is hokum." He asked Paton to end the abuse. Judging from English's reaction to it, Paton's letter in reply, unfortunately not preserved, was no kind of apology. The subject of a possible libel action crept into their interchange, although English denied initiating such a notion and thought Paton's remarks "rather petulant." The items that the college had planted in the newspapers concerning the Thompson controversy were insolent and lying, he wrote. Only his zeal for education caused him to correct stupid errors. He deserved thanks, like Socrates. "Why do you wish to shield such shoddy pretense?" (Paton 1932 [6, 10 February])

A few weeks later, English had a new complaint. This time, it concerned no great universe of knowledge like paleontology or marine biology, but the lowly potato. The *Evening Telegram* had begun a big push in March with articles and editorials advocating that people should grow potatoes, and giving instructions on how to do it. In the depth of depression, many public-spirited operations in Newfoundland were grappling with the problem of maintaining nutrition in a poor country whose cash economy had failed. "Grow your own vegetables" was the message being broadcast from the Department of Public Health, from Memorial's extension program, the summer school for teachers, and other agencies.

The *Telegram* launched a weekly column on agriculture in Newfoundland conditions and editorialized “Let the Land Help Us Out.” By early April, English was once more writing almost daily letters to Paton, whom he indeed seemed to accept as the arbiter of science. Now he was exposing errors propagated by all the various experts whom the *Evening Telegram* had enlisted to help push the agricultural campaign. These were “pseudo scientific articles.... those men are teaching scientific heresy and flying in the face of experience and all that real science has to say” (*Evening Telegram* 15 March 1932, 6, 10; 19 March 1932, 6, 12; 22 March 1932, 7; Paton 1932 [2, 4 April]).

To judge the merit on each side of these old quarrels is very difficult, but is it really necessary? Arthur English was in his mid-50s when he last crossed swords with the university college and its president. He does not seem to have had regular employment. Paton was almost seventy. Neither man was married. Was it just a case of two old cranks who struck sparks off each other? Or did they both have valid points on their side? English certainly claimed a wide expertise: geology, biology, fossil history, cultivation of vegetables, and the cure of fish. Perhaps he really did know too much, or thought he did.⁸ Part of his motivation seems purely nationalistic. Disowning his surname, English defended his island home against what he perceived to be the stupidity and mistakes of outsiders—Sleggs, Thompson, Paton—all Britishers, held in inappropriately high regard because they were foreign. Arthur English continued living in St. John’s and watching public affairs until his death in 1940. Once Paton was replaced as college president by a Newfoundlander, however, he directed no further public criticisms towards Memorial and the causes that the college supported.

Disloyalty

An interesting little dispute in 1940 once again brought the college some unfavourable publicity. In Europe, the “phony war” lasted until springtime when Germany suddenly occupied Scandinavia and blitzkrieged France into defeat and surrender. Soon, Britain (along with Newfoundland and other dominions) would stand alone. Meanwhile, back in St. John’s, Professor Allan Gillingham issued a writing assignment which he thought would give a good stretch to both the vocabulary and imagination of students in his German class. They were to write essays, in German of course, describing the German navy’s triumphant autumn cruise in British waters after the hypothetical conquest of England. The students did well enough with their essays, in which unbroken British pride and defiance naturally became popular themes. But Gillingham did less well when news of his traitorous task leaked through the city. Letters of criticism appeared, he became the subject of a police report, and the *Telegram* editorialized against the professor’s “stupid and callous indifference” and “lack of judgment.” Gillingham pointed out the assignment was meant to be treated lightly, and apologized. Had he not been a loyal son of Newfoundland, born and bred in St. John’s, calls for his resignation would have likely been more forceful (*Daily News* 31 May 1940, 12; 5 June 1940, 4; *Evening Telegram* 30 May 1940, 6).

Harrington and Dr. Hunter

The most painful controversy of the old college occurred in the fall of 1943. As in the Gillingham affair, both sides were probably right. It was not a case of two mismatched oldsters preferring to berate each other rather than to become more closely acquainted but an embarrassing and bitter quarrel between one of the Memorial faculty’s strongest pillars and a brilliant former student, even protégé. After his first graduation from Memorial in 1936, Michael Harrington established a reputation as a reflective and sound broadcaster, journalist, and commentator on public affairs. At the 1943 Golden Jubilee celebration for Brother P. V. Strapp, bursar of St. Bonaventure’s College, Harrington delivered the toast to Newfoundland. In the ninth year since Newfoundland lost self-rule, he used the occasion to attack Commission of Government.

“During the past few years we have lost our insularity. Strangers have come amongst us who measure our progress by the height of their sky scrapers.” Not only had the Commission badly fumbled, Harrington asserted, but its “mismanagement” was “every bit as deliberate as the former anti-settlement laws in its eventual purpose to hinder rather than to help” (*Daily News* 27 October 1943, 5).

Among Harrington’s former professors, perhaps Dr. Alfred Hunter, Department of English, had done more than others to mold him as wordsmith and communicator. He must have been proud of a former student’s progress in journalism and public affairs, but he could not condone Harrington’s unrestrained diatribe against the regime. Hunter’s letter to the editor, a few days after the celebration at St. Bonaventure’s, asserted that Harrington had gone too far. “With his attribution to the present government of mismanagement of our affairs, few will disagree.” However, the former student had overlooked one of the cardinal rules of fair comment and debate. One should never impute motives characterizing opponents with purposes other than those they claimed for themselves. “I know Mr. Harrington well enough to believe that having now seen his speech in cold print, he will acknowledge that he over stepped the mark in bringing a charge of malice aforethought.” (*Daily News* 30 October 1943, 4).

Harrington’s response, like his superb if strongly worded toast, showed that Hunter and others had certainly helped him achieve mastery in the use of language as a whip. Was Commission of Government rule benevolent? Only Hunter, he wrote, and six other individuals—there were six commissioners—would say so. From the results, it seemed clear the Commission had wanted to hinder and harm Newfoundland: 6,000 people on the dole, a bill proposing special treatment for special areas withdrawn, the country’s resources wasted on impractical land settlement schemes instead of being devoted to the vital control of tuberculosis.

With Hunter’s choice of terms as befits a biased bystander, no one will cavil; to his high handed dismissal of a considered and popular opinion as hypothetical and fantastic nonsense, many will take exception.... I and all others like me will maintain our right to express our firm opinions and convictions. (*Daily News* 1 November 1943, 4).

A rebuttal from Hunter was equally firm and rather touching. He had not defended anything the Commission had done. His point was that fair play and just criticism prohibited judging the motives of others. Harrington’s assertion that Hunter was the Commission’s one friend in all of Newfoundland successfully involved him in the regime’s odium. Within hours of that day’s newspaper coming out, Hunter wrote that his wife

was made the object of a violently abusive attack.... The expression ‘biased bystander’ is painful; it is also quite unmerited, as is quite well known to all those people who are familiar with my efforts in the last 18 years. Mr. Harrington is familiar with at least some of them, and the expression is as unworthy of him as it is painful to me. (*Daily News* 5 November 1943, 4).

Harrington closed the exchange with a letter regretting the attack on Mrs. Hunter and “the distasteful way her name has been dragged into the limelight” (which may have been a final slap at his old professor) (*Daily News* 6 November 1943, 4).

Other Critics

How scattered these little controversies were showed that Memorial was almost immune to public criticism during its first two decades of existence. Afterwards, critics were more frequent and more cutting. Why should that be? The very first years were likely a honeymoon period, the college protected by the charm

of novelty. Then, after Newfoundland's self-government was cancelled in 1934, respect for public opinion went into eclipse. Democracy finally revived after the war, with the National Convention of 1946-48 and the provincial self-government thereafter. This provided a climate of citizenship in which people were more willing than previously to speak out on public affairs. Also, from the end of the war and particularly after the 1949 university charter, with growing enrollment Memorial was of interest to an ever-growing proportion of Newfoundland, individuals, families, and taxpayers.

A full-scale debate in the newspapers in late 1949 between attackers and defenders of the college/university introduced the institution to the difficult 1950s and 1960s—a period when Memorial's spokespeople had to learn to take knocks as well as bouquets. The attackers rather carried the day. Their charge was led by "J. C." at McGill University whose letter, published in the St. John's *Sunday Herald*, offered the view that the college was operated by a "bunch of old maids" who had run it into a rut. "Memorial is a standing joke up here" in Montreal. This former student regretted the time spent at Parade Street (*Sunday Herald* 23 October 1949, 6).

This was a loud, tough shot, but it passed unremarked the following Sunday. Then "V.M.H." wrote to say that it was "doubtful if J. C. knew what he was talking about." This commentator, identified as being connected with the college, although in what capacity was not said, thought Memorial had done an excellent job during its twenty-five years, helping raise the Newfoundland standard of education and giving ambitious young people a chance to at least begin degree studies in their own country. V.M.H. surmised that J. C. hoped to be among the new staff appointed to the university. But instead, he should be "horse whipped ... for his disdainful abuse of the students' code of ethics" (*Sunday Herald* 6 November 1949, 5).

One wishes V.M.H. had specified what code that was. It was likely the unwritten rule that graduates only spoke well of the *alma mater*, perhaps strengthened and made more binding in this case by the extraordinary sense of collegiality and corporateness that had always bound together all the years and levels of Memorial's adherents, and the assertion of national pride recognizing that Memorial expressed Newfoundland in many special ways in which Protestant Dalhousie could not represent all Nova Scotia, nor Anglophone McGill, Quebec.

Whatever tendencies could be mustered to Memorial's defence: nationalism, carefully nurtured unity of alumni with the old school, or the creed of student loyalism internationally recognized, they were not sufficient to keep quiet a crowd of critics drawn into utterance by the V.M.H. letter. A "former student" wrote to say he had certainly noticed the "petty way" things were run at the Newfoundland college. Those who then went on to study in Canada or the United States quickly realized how "completely wasted was the time spent at St. John's glorified high school." What was needed was a new president and "new aggressive staff and unless said staff is obtained by the Government it is only a waste of time to attempt to do anything with our local College" (*Sunday Herald* 13 November 1949, 34). Next, "M.C.F." defended the original McGill commentator.

Since when is a student not allowed to speak out against the heads of a College.... I am a student at Memorial and I believe that the present staff are doing the best they can, but the type of inspiring leadership needed to make a school great is sadly lacking. (*Sunday Herald* 20 November 1949, 6)

The last shot in the campaign, from another anonymous graduate, agreed with this focussing of the blame. It was not the whole college that was faulty, but the top leadership. "I feel that a great deal was done that should not have been done, and a great deal was left undone, and what the College needs more than anything else is a good hard-hitting president, such as the type found in some of the American colleges, and then step back and watch our little old St. John's University blossom out!" (*Sunday Herald* 27 November 1949, 6)

Hatcher was perhaps fortunate to be on sick leave while these recriminations were flying through the air, so he never had to take official notice of them. Dr. Hunter gathered up the hostile clippings, bundled them off to the board of governors, and asked whether the college should make a response, and in what form? (Paton 1949 [23 November]). Apparently, no official statement was made. When the university's new board of regents took office the following year, one of its major policies for the transition from college to university was—bluntly expressed by one of the governors—to get rid of the dead wood.

It seems that J. C., M.C.F., and the graduates without initials had expressed opinions that were, to a certain extent, commonly held. Perhaps the Americanization of popular values brought about by Newfoundland's wartime experience had helped make this society both more fussy and more assertive. Since 1925, Memorial had earned the right to exist and to expect that almost every university-drawn Newfoundlander would enter its programs. The institution naively admired for its novelty in the late 1920s was more critically appraised by the late 1940s. Now that existence of the college, in conjunction with other factors, had made the clientele more demanding, the right to be more fully respected was still something for which it could grow and reach.

The history of Memorial College public relations thus ends on a somewhat sour note, with critics who knew the institution well hurling some abuse and pointed suggestions for improvement, all the while staying anonymously under cover. This, however, was a feature of the transitional phase, of growing pains approaching university status. Before that time, before the late 1940s, the college had enjoyed mostly good publicity and no sustained criticism that needed to be taken seriously. In healthy measure, the College reputation was due to the brilliant tradition of *College Notes*, advertising made believable in the guise of news. Throughout the quarter-century, therefore, Memorial seemingly made many more friends than enemies.

How to handle academic public relations is not a matter that has engaged much scholarly interest. A few practical guides emphasize, among other things, the value of consistent and continuous relations with the media: to broadcast one's message and lessen the impact of negative events when they occur (Foskett 1992; Kowalski 1996; Lumby and Foskett 1999; Rowland 1977). Oxford Professor Kenneth Wheare (1967) is quite preoccupied with those negative possibilities. They are bound to proliferate, he stresses, where crowds of experimental and energetic young folk congregate. He advises universities to be perfectly forthright in discussing whatever it was that happened while still trying to protect everyone's privacy. It would be prudent to publicize plenty of positive news, to help offset the eventual, unavoidable scandals.

A thoughtful contribution to the very thin public-relations literature concerns how American women's colleges faced up to changing interpretations of feminism in the 1940s (Olsen 2000). In Canada, there have been no studies at all. Authors of university histories almost totally ignore public relations. This is even true of my own work, the current article being a chapter that was expunged, for reasons of length, from a manuscript (MacLeod 1990) as it headed for publication. The index to Axelrod (1982) has several references to various media; they mostly concern the initial funding drive for York University, or academics using the press to conduct polemics; rarely is there an account of normal campus activities, with a positive spin (13, 17, 25, 64, 70, 73, 81, 154, 218).

A 1940 visitor from New Brunswick perhaps correctly read the pulse of Newfoundland higher education when he referred to Memorial's "central and commanding site, both physically and in the minds and hearts of the people ... in a peculiar and very real sense the property of all" (Peacock, 1940). Defensive nationalism, no matter how small or petty it might be, that aligned citizens with Newfoundland's only university, coupled with realization of the many good works the university had done, together kept the college high in public esteem. When Memorial entered philatelic history, featured on a new 1943 stamp with its ornate main entrance pillars badly off-centred by the awkward single wing added in 1932, yet flanked and redeemed by twin symbolic Newfoundland spruce, one knew the college had gained some durable legitimacy. It was no mean stamp either, 30 cents, the largest denomination in the whole drawer.⁹

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Notes

1. Memorial's policies of good partnership with its host community are discussed in MacLeod (1990, 166-83).
2. A basic analysis separates "public relations (with its two-way dimension)" from publicity (one-way) (Olsen 2000, 450). An authoritative textbook (Cutlip and Center 1971, 13-17) provides a further breakdown of functions: press-agentry, promotion, publicity, lobbying, public affairs, and public relations.
3. See Paton's first annual survey in Newfoundland Department of Education (1925-26, 145-46).
4. In a survey of the most recent, fullest institutional histories, sporadic use of the newspapers was found at just one university. See Johnston (1981, 73).
5. Allan Gillingham had already finished Grade 12 when he entered Memorial in 1925, part of a very small group doing second-year work. "Halfway through the year Mr. Paton ... called me into his office. He told me that I was too young, that I could well afford to repeat First Year work, that it was *important for the College* to have one of its students win the Jubilee Scholarship ... it was my duty to the College to take the Senior Associate examinations and win the Jubilee Scholarship for the College. I continued with Mathematics and French at the Second Year level, but reverted to the First Year program with English, French, Mathematics, Latin and Chemistry. This scholarship ... financed my two years at McGill University." Gillingham to M. MacLeod, 9 February 1983 (MacLeod 1999, 58-60).
6. This non-sale is discussed in MacLeod (1979, 13-14).
7. Paton's review is in the *Globe* 5 January 1929, but had been in the editor's hands since September (Paton 1929 [28 September]).
8. English (1903) seemed more humble as a younger man. Describing a trip to Labrador, he wrote, "Can I tell you anything new about icebergs...? Impossible; I am more poet than scientist..." (19-20).
9. The stamp was shown in *Daily News* 31 December 1942, 3. It was first put on sale at 9:00 a.m., New Year's Day, 1943.

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