

“The Grandmother’s Story”: Oral Tradition, Family Memory, and a Mysterious Manuscript*

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RÉSUMÉ La découverte par l’auteur d’un manuscrit sans provenance mais dont le contenu historique semblait unique l’a contraint à appliquer les outils archivistiques afin d’évaluer son authenticité et sa fiabilité. En l’absence du contexte de création et de transmission, il ne pouvait se fier à la transcription d’une tradition orale racontée par une grand-mère à ses petits-enfants concernant l’arrivée des loyalistes au Nouveau-Brunswick en 1783. Une enquête plus poussée a révélé des versions différentes de l’histoire de la grand-mère en format imprimé, dans des dépôts d’archives et chez des particuliers, toutes reliées de façon inexpliquée. Dénouer ce mystère a permis de prouver l’authenticité du manuscrit original et également de révéler l’identité de son auteur jusqu’ici anonyme. De plus, il a été possible pour l’auteur d’éclairer les relations entre la tradition orale et l’écrit, le souvenir collectif et la transmission de la mémoire et, enfin, de démontrer le rôle de la recherche dans la pratique archivistique.

ABSTRACT The author’s discovery of a manuscript with no known provenance but seemingly unique historical content compelled him to apply the tools of the archivist to assess its authenticity and reliability. Without an understanding of its context of creation and transmission, he could not trust the written recollections of an oral tradition told by a grandmother to her grandchildren of the coming of the loyalists to New Brunswick in 1783. Further investigation yielded variant versions of the grandmother’s story in print format, archival repositories, and private hands, all connected in some unexplained way. Unravelling this mystery not only proved the accuracy and authenticity of the original manuscript, but revealed the identity of the hitherto anonymous author and insights into the relationship of oral tradition versus the written word, collective remembering, the making and transmission of memory, and the role of research in archival practice.

Doing research at the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick in the early 1990s, I discovered a curious document – or rather a photocopy of a curious document – in the family histories reference collection.¹ It comprised two

* My thanks to Sheila Donaldson, Meryl Fisher, Kara Quann, Fred Farrell, and the anonymous reviewers who have read various drafts of this article and made many helpful suggestions for improvement.

¹ Provincial Archives of New Brunswick (hereafter PANB), MC 1, Fisher family file.

foolscap pages of densely handwritten text describing the family of the loyalists Lewis Fisher and Mary Barbara Till, and the desperate circumstances of the loyalists who settled in Fredericton in the fall and winter of 1783. What was unusual about the manuscript was that it had no author, no title, no date, and almost no punctuation. There was barely a period, comma, or semi-colon to be found! The manuscript exhibited somewhat random capitalization and odd or phonetic spellings of many words. Its content was equally remarkable for it contained genealogical information not available elsewhere in church registers or other sources. It vividly described the hardships Lewis and Mary Fisher had faced in the New Brunswick wilderness that first winter. Could it be the key to unlocking the mysteries of my family history? Who had written it? When was it written? Had the author written it in the nineteenth century from first-hand knowledge or was it the rough notes of a twentieth century researcher based on sources now lost? How accurate was the information? Who had the original? These questions demanded answers before I could accept its veracity without reservations.

Finding these answers would require not only the skills of the genealogist or family historian, but also those of an archivist. A thorough exploration of the context and creation of the manuscript offered the only means of establishing trust in its accuracy and authenticity. Though some archivists have doubted the value of such in-depth research into the history of records, their creators, and users, my discoveries vastly expanded my knowledge of this manuscript; knowledge that would prove vital to an archivist in its appraisal and description.² Such research creates new knowledge which is often essential to understanding the context of the records entrusted to our care. My exploration of the provenance and transmission of this manuscript ultimately demonstrated its tremendous value for the genealogy of the Fisher family and the early history of New Brunswick.

Returning to the manuscript itself, I recalled from the look and feel of the reproduction at the Provincial Archives that it dated probably from the 1970s or 1980s. But at home, of course, I worked from a photocopy of a photocopy so few further clues could be gleaned from its physical characteristics. Some brief excerpts from the manuscript will give a feel for its content and style and its evident historical and genealogical value. It begins with genealogy:

Lewis Fisher was the eldest son of Michel Fisher and Maria There was eight brothers and one sister Ann and the sons Peter david Rynhard Conrad herman Marinus and

2 Terry Cook, "From Information to Knowledge: An Intellectual Paradigm for Archives," in Tom Nesmith, ed., *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance* (Metuchen, 1993), pp. 201–26, and Hugh A. Taylor, "Information Ecology and the Archives of the 1980s," in Tom Nesmith, ed., *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance* (Metuchen, 1993), pp. 185–200. Cook is perhaps the strongest advocate of the critical role of research in archival practice.

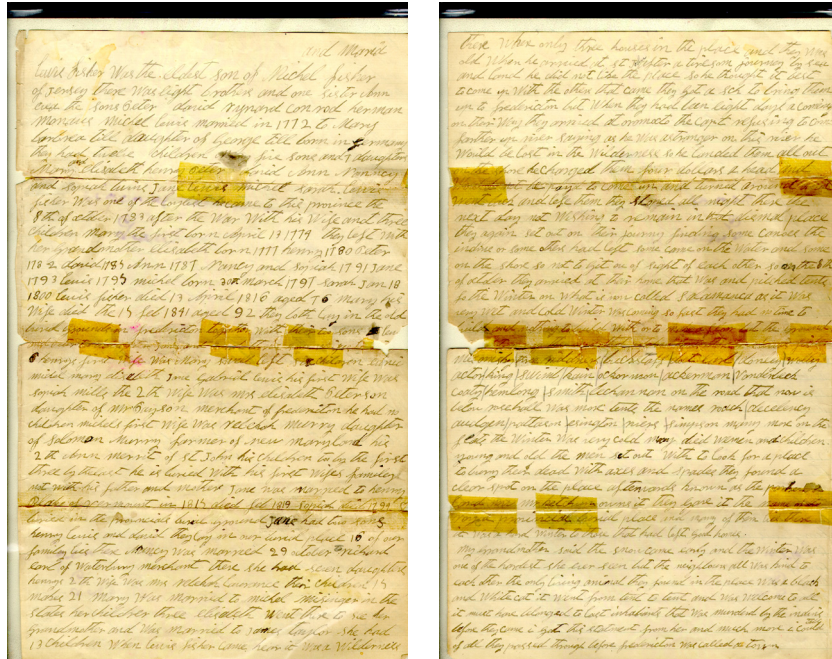


Figure 1 Picture of the manuscript, both sides (author's collection).

Michel Lewis married in 1772 to Mary Barbara Till daughter of George Till born in Germany. They had twelve children five sons and 7 daughters Mary Eliza Henry Peter David Ann Nancy and Sophia twins Jane Lewis Michel and Sarah ...

It also described the arrival of Lewis and Mary Barbara Fisher in October 1783 in New Brunswick as loyalist refugees in a similar stream of consciousness style:

when he arrived at St. John after a tiresome journey by sea and land he did not like the place so he thought it best to come up with the others who came they got a schooner to bring them on to Fredericton but when they had been eight days a coming on their journey they arrived at Oromocto the captain refusing to come further up river saying as he was a stranger on the river he would be lost in the wilderness so he landed them all out on the shore he charged them four dollars a head and would not be paid to come up and turned around and went back and left them they stopped all night there the next day not wishing to remain in that dismal place they again set out on their journey ... so on the 8th of October they arrived at their home that was and pitched tents for the winter on what is now called Salamanca as it was very wet and cold winter was

coming so fast they had no time to build and nothing to build with or to make a floor but the ground.³

The narrative continues to describe the loyalist experience that first winter at Fredericton but ends abruptly at the bottom of the second page with the words, “my grandmother said the snow came early and the winter was one of the hardest she ever seen ... i got this statement from her and much more i could tell of all they passed through before fredericton was called a town.”⁴

This last statement is the only clue to the authorship of the manuscript; it was written by a grandchild of Mary Barbara Fisher. Textual analysis, or diplomatics in its broadest sense being the scholarly investigation of written documentary sources,⁵ can help us further understand the context of its creation. We have some clues to its date of composition from internal evidence. The last date specifically mentioned is the death of the grandmother on 15 February 1841, aged ninety-two years old. It also mentions, however, that her youngest daughter, Sarah, born 18 January 1800, lay in the family plot in the Old Burying Ground in Fredericton. Newspaper obituaries tell us that Sarah Fisher died 24 June 1879.⁶ Another clue is provided by the reference to the location of the first burial ground: “the parker’s land now mr ketchum owns it.” A local history reveals that in 1865 the Hon. Neville Parker sold his estate to Mr. Henry G.C. Ketchum who died in the early 1890s. Similarly, mention of “the road that is now below rosehall” suggests that it was written before 1886 – the year that Rose Hall, once the property of General Benedict Arnold, burned to the ground.⁷ We may infer from this evidence that the author wrote the manuscript between 1879 and 1886 based on the memories of conversations with his or her grandmother from before 1841.⁸

The story of the coming of the loyalists to Fredericton in 1783 and the toll of the first winter, when many died from hunger and exposure, told on the second page was not new to me or to any student of New Brunswick history. Turn of the century historian Rev. W.O. Raymond (1853–1923), a prolific and still respected author of works of local, colonial, and military history, had told the story of the founding of Fredericton in a number of articles and books. Histo-

3 PANB, MC 1, Fisher family file.

4 Ibid.

5 Leonard Boyle, “Diplomatics,” in James M. Powell, ed., *Medieval Studies: An Introduction* (Syracuse, 1976), pp. 73–75. Boyle defines diplomatics as “the scholarly investigation of any and every written documentary source.”

6 Daniel Johnson, ed., *Vital Statistics from New Brunswick Newspapers* (Saint John, ca. 1991), vol. 47 (notices 150, 2248, 2433) and vol. 48 (notices 1019, 1157).

7 Isabel Louise Hill, *Fredericton, New Brunswick, British North America* (Fredericton, 1968), pp. 106–8. Benedict Arnold had owned the Rose Hall property in the late 1780s.

8 Mary Barbara Fisher had twelve grandchildren who were still alive in 1880 and had been born before 1830.

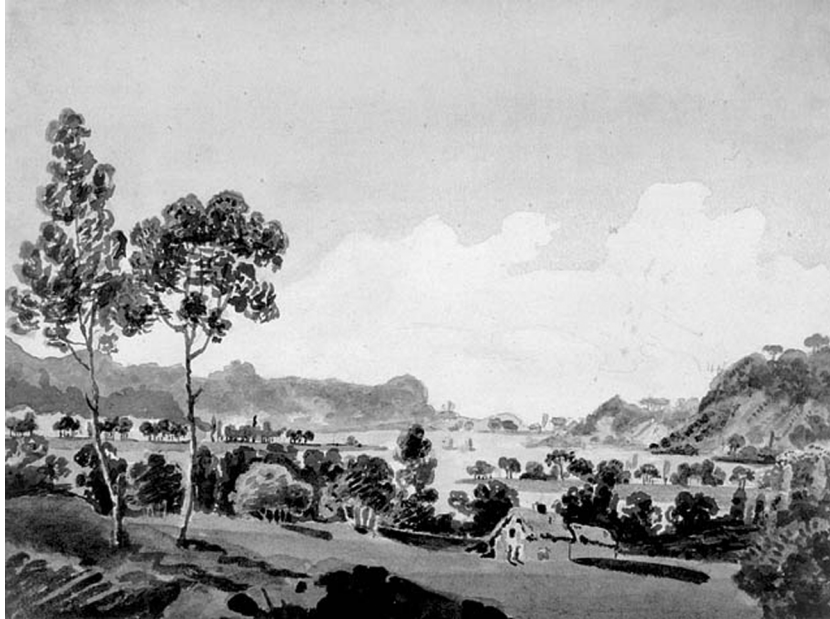


Figure 2 A representative view of the St. John River valley: the watercolour “St. John River” by George Heriot, 1807 (LAC/C-012771).

rian D.G. Bell recently described Raymond as “the dominant historian of the Saint John school in both quantity and quality of scholarship,” and as “perhaps the finest amateur historian English Canada ever produced.”⁹ In 1919, Raymond had published a lengthy article in *Collections of the New Brunswick Historical Society* titled, “Peter Fisher, The First Historian of New Brunswick.”¹⁰ In the article, he claimed that Peter Fisher, the second son of Lewis and Mary Barbara Fisher, was the “first historian” of the province based on two small books published anonymously in Saint John in 1825 and 1838: *Sketches of New Brunswick*¹¹ and *Notitia of New Brunswick*.¹² Raymond refuted W.G. MacFarlane’s claim that Alexander Wedderburn had written one

9 D.G. Bell, ed., *The Judges of New Brunswick* (Fredericton, 1985), p. xi.

10 W.O. Raymond, “Peter Fisher, The First Historian of New Brunswick,” *Collections of the New Brunswick Historical Society* 10 (1919), pp. 5–56.

11 Anonymous, *Sketches of New Brunswick; Containing an Account of the First Settlement of the Province* (Saint John, 1825). Raymond donated his personal copy of *Sketches of New Brunswick* to the Public Archives in Ottawa (now Library and Archives Canada).

12 Anonymous, *Notitia of New Brunswick for 1836 and extending into 1837: Comprising Historical, Geographical, Statistical and Commercial Notices of the Province* (Saint John, 1838).

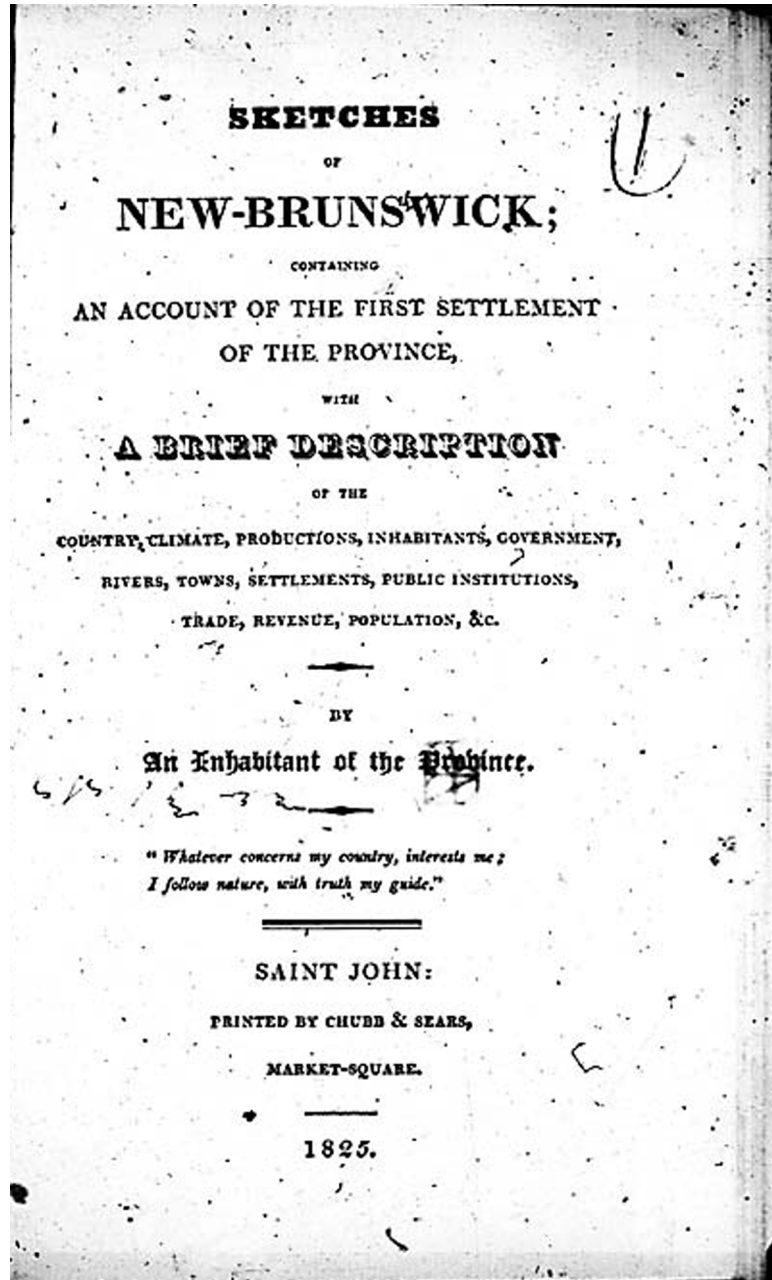
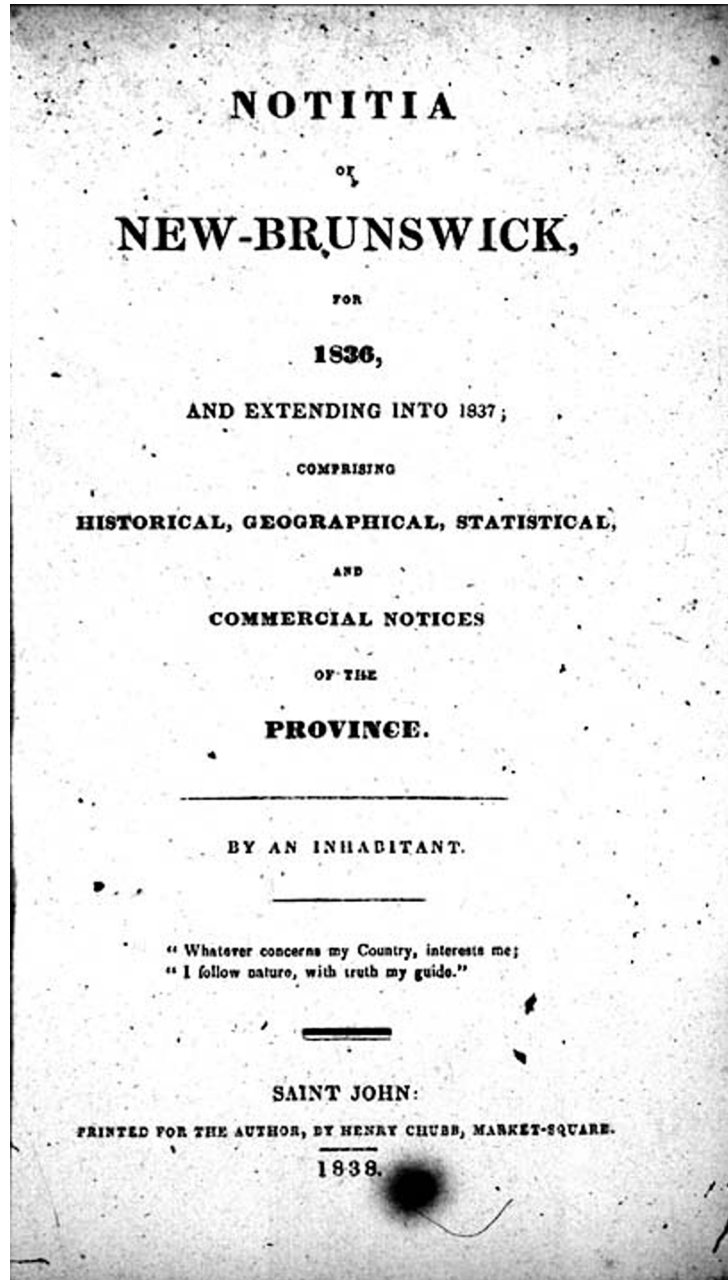


Figure 3 Picture of the title page of *Sketches of New Brunswick* (scanned image from <www.ourroots.ca>).



Figures 4 Picture of the title page of *Notitia of New Brunswick* (scanned image from <www.ourroots.ca>).

of the works by proving Peter Fisher's authorship based on similarities of text, inscriptions in extant copies, and interviews with those who had known him. *Sketches of New Brunswick* was reprinted in 1921 by the New Brunswick Historical Society and the Government of New Brunswick with an introduction by Raymond. In this 1825 work, Peter Fisher had included a brief but moving description of the loyalists' sufferings without food or shelter in the winter wilderness which he had heard "from persons of undoubted veracity, and who had been eye witnesses of what they related" – undoubtedly his parents.¹³

Raymond had based his introduction to *Sketches of New Brunswick* on an earlier article written in 1899 for George U. Hay's *Education Review Supplementary Readings* series on Canadian history.¹⁴ In the article, titled "Founders of Fredericton. The Story of a Grandmother," Raymond confided

It was about the year 1898 that Mr. William Fisher, a younger brother of Judge Charles Fisher [sons of Peter Fisher], read to me in his apartments at the Park Hotel in St. John, N.B., "The Story of a Grandmother." He did not intrust the manuscript to my hands, but allowed me to make full notes, pausing from time to time at my request. Afterwards, at my desire, he re-read the manuscript, in order that I might be sure of the accuracy of my notes. The original manuscript I think was written by Mr. Fisher's sister from recollections of conversations with her grandmother.¹⁵

William Fisher was born in 1818 and died in 1899, the year following his recital to Raymond. He was a merchant in Fredericton for many years, though he had tried his hand at photography in the late 1840s. Later in life he had served briefly as Indian Commissioner for the province but had to resign from office because of his reluctance to tolerate corruption. His granddaughter Maude Grant later described him as remote and very straight-backed.¹⁶

It seemed possible, even probable, that the photocopy at the Provincial Archives was of the original manuscript read by William Fisher to W.O. Ray-

13 Peter Fisher, *The First History of New Brunswick* (Saint John, 1921), p. 12. Peter Fisher was alive himself for the first winter in Fredericton but only 1 or 2 years old. Joanna Ritchie, *Cartographies of Silence: An Annotated Bibliography of English Language Diaries and Reminiscences of New Brunswick Women, 1783–1980* (Ottawa, 1997), pp. 38–39, lists the published version of "The Grandmother's Story" but not the surviving manuscript versions of Mary Fisher's reminiscences.

14 George U. Hay, ed., *Educational Review Supplementary Readings: Canadian History* 6 (June 1899), pp. 163–69.

15 Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), Sir George Parkin fonds, MG 30 D44, vol. 76, Genealogy file, W.O. Raymond, "Founders of Fredericton. The Story of a Grandmother," pp. 25, 224–25, 229.

16 LAC, George Raleigh Parkin fonds, MG 30 D77, vol. 5, Fisher ancestry correspondence file, Maude E. Grant to Raleigh Parkin, 15 January 1950. There is a portrait of William Fisher in the holdings of Library and Archives Canada, painted by his granddaughter Ruth Best in 1899.

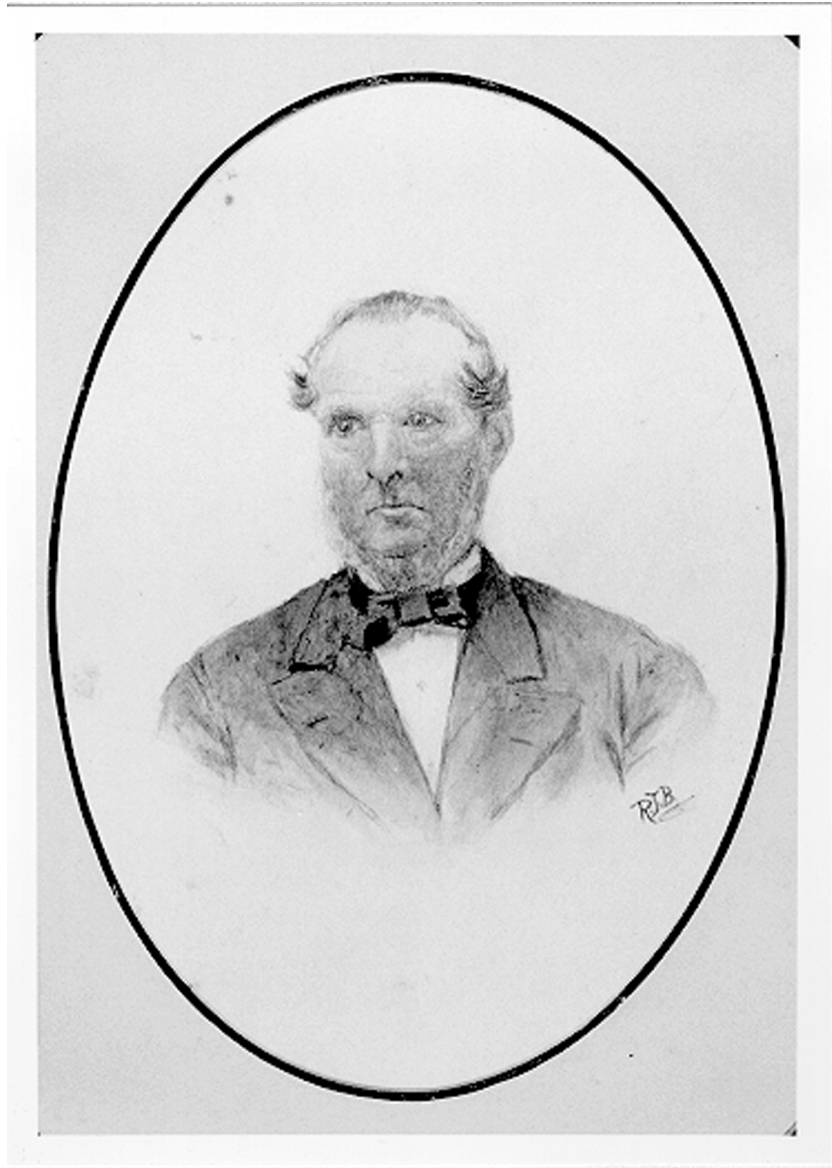


Figure 5 Portrait of William Fisher by Ruth J. Best (LAC/C-104567).

mond. I returned to the texts to confirm my suspicions but came away with more questions than answers. Careful comparison showed that Raymond's article contained, in fact, a much fuller account of the first winter in Fredericton than found in the manuscript from the Provincial Archives. His version runs to about four to five long typescript pages, more than double the length of the manuscript. Raymond explained that the story "is not quoted from the lips of its original narrator, Mary Fisher" and admitted that he had "ventured to make a very few corrections of facts (based on documentary evidence) and to slightly amplify the narrative. Nevertheless, we have in the following pages what is substantially the 'Story' of the Grandmother."¹⁷ Raymond's own corrections and amplifications were not sufficient to explain the differences between his article and the photocopy I found in the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick, for Raymond's account contains entire anecdotes and incidents that are missing from the manuscript. A possible explanation for the missing anecdotes is that the manuscript is partial; it ends on the last line of the second page so it is possible that following pages are missing. On the other hand the last sentence is very much a conclusion. You will recall that it reads "i got this statement from her and much more i could tell of all they passed through before fredericton was called a town." It seems to end abruptly because the author had reached the bottom of the page. Another significant difference reveals that neither the manuscript nor Raymond's article had been derived from the other. The photocopy at the Provincial Archives opens with significant genealogical information about Lewis Fisher and Mary Barbara Till that is absent from Raymond's "The Story of a Grandmother"; thus the manuscript could not be derived from the article. Raymond did include some family background in the introductory paragraphs but did not provide vital details like Mary Barbara Fisher's maiden name or the name of Lewis Fisher's father which are found in the manuscript, confirming in turn that it was not the source for his article. This evidence all points to the independence of the two texts.

Still, it seemed inescapable that the common reference to the grandmother as the source bound the two texts together in some mysterious way. Perhaps the account read to Raymond by William Fisher was an intermediary text derived, expanded, and polished from an original manuscript, of which the Archives in Fredericton now housed a photocopy? For the moment, I was stymied. Raymond had cited the source of the manuscript as a sister of William Fisher. Two sisters had survived to adulthood from this family: Anne Connell (1809–1895) and Susannah Isabella Smith (1830–1911). Only Anne Connell was old enough to have remembered conversations with her grandmother. The Charles Connell family fonds at the Carleton County Historical Society, however, did not contain the original manuscript or an intermediary text. The trail

17 LAC, Sir George Parkin fonds, MG 30 D44, vol. 76, Genealogy file, W.O. Raymond, "Founders of Fredericton. The Story of a Grandmother," pp. 25, 224–25, 229.

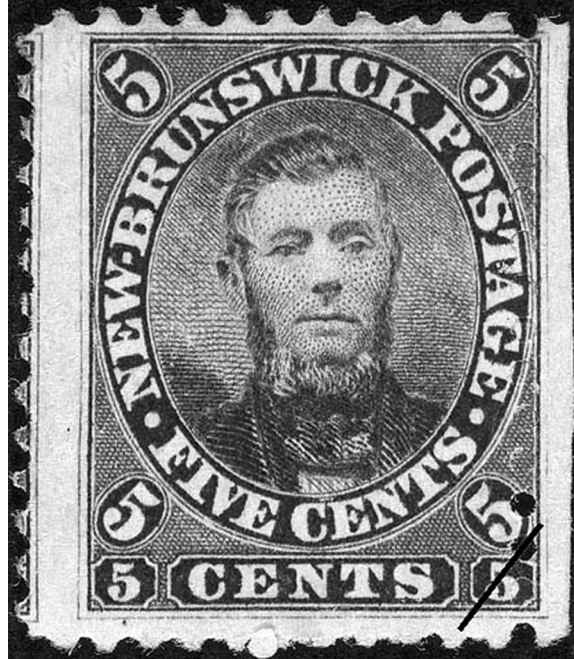


Figure 6 Image of the Charles Connell stamp from the Library and Archives Canada.

ran cold. (Connell is best-known as the backwoods Postmaster-General of New Brunswick who in 1860 had the audacity to substitute his own likeness for that of Queen Victoria on a new issue of stamps. The ensuing uproar compelled him to resign from office.¹⁸)

Years later, my ongoing research on the descendants of Lewis and Mary Fisher, provided not just one but two such candidates for an intermediary text! My discovery of the “History and Reminiscences of the Fisher Family, &c., &c.”¹⁹ in the Sir George Parkin papers at Library and Archives Canada was purely fortuitous. Parkin’s wife, Annie Connell Fisher (1858–1931), was the daughter of William Fisher. She married George Parkin in 1878, long before he rose to prominence and fame as an educator, author, and wandering “apostle” of the British empire.²⁰

18 Carleton County Historical Society, Woodstock, N.B., Charles Connell fonds, and “Charles Connell,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography, 1871–1880*, p. 191.

19 LAC, Sir George Parkin fonds, MG 30 D44, vol. 76, Genealogy file, “History and Reminiscences of the Fisher Family, &c., &c.,” pp. 25, 233–25, 238.

20 See Terry Cook, *Apostle of Empire: Sir George Parkin and Imperial Federation* (Ph.D. Thesis, Queen’s University, 1977).

The “History and Reminiscences of the Fisher Family” is a single-spaced five-page typescript which correlates closely with the narrative thread of Raymond’s “Grandmother’s Story”; closely enough to have been its source. To be sure, there are some inexplicable differences. For example, Raymond writes that “Snow fell on the 2nd day of November to the depth of six inches” whereas the Parkin typescript states only that “the weather was wet and becoming cold and wintry.” Here Raymond must have interpolated factual evidence from another source,²¹ because this precise detail is not found in the manuscript, which simply records that it was “very wet and cold winter was coming so fast.” The typescript in the Parkin papers, however, contains virtually all of the incidents and anecdotes told to Raymond by William Fisher but has none of family names and dates found in the photocopied manuscript at the Provincial Archives. Nor did it give the author, as I had hoped! I suspected that the “History and Reminiscences” typescript was a revised and sanitized version prepared by William Fisher from a complete version of the original manuscript written by his sister Anne Connell.

I had the story partly right. An even more unlikely discovery came about when I introduced myself to a colleague at Library and Archives Canada, David Brown. He asked me where my family was from. Upon hearing the answer New Brunswick, he said “you could be related to my wife.” I regarded him with some alarm but it turned out that his wife, Ann Fisher, was a great-great-granddaughter of William Fisher. They had in their possession a typescript document titled, “Memorandum of the Fisher Family from 1783, Information and Reminiscences of the Fisher Family &c,” which had come from her uncle John Fisher, whose papers later went to the Archives of Ontario.²² This “Memorandum of the Fisher Family” consisted of nine pages double-spaced with a few handwritten corrections.

The “Memorandum” is almost identical in terms of content to the “History and Reminiscences of the Fisher Family” found in the Parkin papers, though its style was slightly less polished. Short gaps left blank in the “Memorandum” typescript indicated that it had been transcribed from an original manuscript in which the handwriting was difficult to decipher. The variations in content were too great, however, for it to have been copied from the cryptic handwriting of the untitled manuscript whose photocopy survived in the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick, whether a complete or partial version. Gaps do not appear in

21 It is possible that Raymond found this precise factual information from another source, perhaps the diary of Benjamin Ingraham which is held in private hands. See Earle Thomas, *Greener Pastures: The Loyalist Experience of Benjamin Ingraham* (Belleville, 1983), pp. 8 and 226. Another possibility is that William Fisher relayed it to him orally in amplification of his manuscript.

22 Archives of Ontario (hereafter AO), John W. Fisher fonds, F 1193. There is a copy of this typescript in the Rev. W.O. Raymond fonds at the New Brunswick Museum.

the “History and Reminiscences” typescript in the Parkin papers which implies that its author had access to the same handwritten original, from which both typescripts were prepared. A partial similarity in the titles of the two typescripts, both include the phrase “Reminiscences of the Fisher Family &c,” also suggest a common origin and possible title for the original. Most importantly, the “Memorandum” typescript gave the authors at the end: “(Signed) Georgianna Fisher, granddaughter, and revised by William Fisher, grandson.”²³

This short but crucial statement confirmed the identity of William Fisher as the reviser who had composed the intermediary text which he had read to Raymond in 1898. Georgianna Fisher, the author of the original manuscript, was not, in fact, his sister. Raymond seemingly had erred in this regard, perhaps deliberately. Georgianna was William’s cousin. She is a shadowy figure. Georgianna Fisher was born about 1822 and baptized as an adult 25 March 1840, aged eighteen, in the Church of England in Fredericton, the illegitimate daughter of Sarah Fisher, the youngest daughter of Lewis and Mary Fisher.²⁴ Land and census records suggest that Georgianna and Sarah Fisher had continued to live with Mary Barbara Fisher in the old Fisher homestead on Forest Hill in Fredericton until the latter’s death in 1841.²⁵ Georgianna, though only nineteen at the time, would have been well-placed to listen to and remember stories from her grandmother about the founding of Fredericton. She may have been responsible for the primary care of her aging grandmother. Sometime after her mother’s death in 1879, Georgianna Fisher wrote down her recollections of her conversations with her grandmother, perhaps pressed by relatives to do so or inspired by the centennial of the coming of the loyalists in 1883. Writing was not a means of expression with which she was comfortable.

In response to a letter to the editor of the Fredericton *Daily Gleaner*, a resident interested in local history pointed me towards a 1934 speech to the York-Sunbury Historical Society by Captain H.F.G. Woodbridge about Forest Hill. In a postscript to the speech, Woodbridge painted a wonderful portrait of Georgianna Fisher:

... an elderly lady of small stature, garbed in black and wearing a sunbonnet, as you pass you hear – “What a lovely morning this is, God’s so good to us, come in my gar-

23 Georgianna Fisher and William Fisher, “Memorandum of the Fisher Family from 1783, Information and Reminiscences of the Fisher Family &c,” typescript in the possession of David and Ann Brown of Osgoode, Ontario.

24 PANB, reel F1114, Register of Baptisms, 25 March 1840, Christ Church (Church of England), Fredericton. Georgianna Fisher does not appear in family tree charts prepared by Lady Parkin in the 1920s or Charles M.P. Fisher of Sackville in the 1960s.

25 PANB, RS98, reel F5659, Land Registry Office, York County (Georgianna Fisher); and LAC, Fredericton census returns (King’s Ward), 1851–1891, reels M-7482, M-556, C-10381, C-13181, and T-6307. Land records show the transfer of “lands occupied by the late Lewis Fisher” from Georgianna Fisher to Edwin Fisher in 1891.

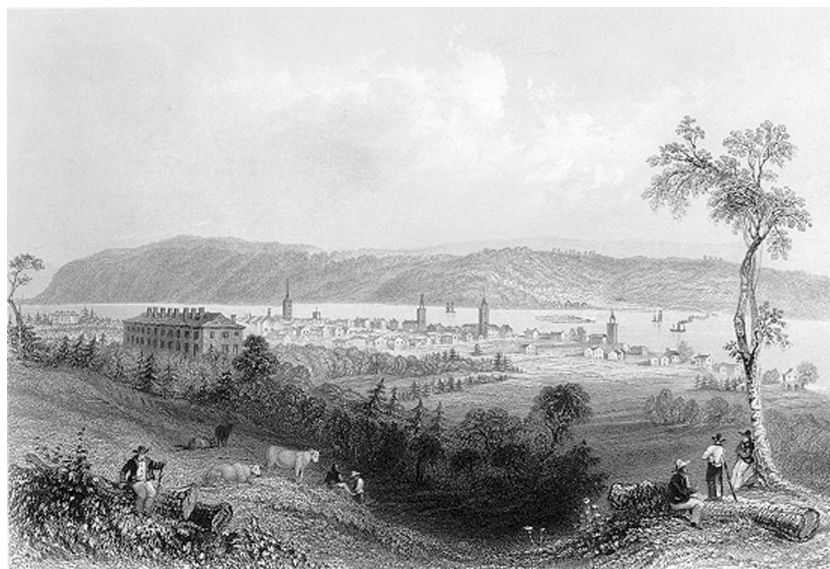


Figure 7 Fredericton, New Brunswick in 1842, from the edge of Forest Hill. The large building at the left is the old Arts Building of King's College, built in 1828 and designed by the architect John E. Woolford. It is now Sir Howard Douglas Hall of the University of New Brunswick. Government House, faintly visible at the extreme left, is also recognizable. Engraver: James Bayliss Allen. Artist: William Henry Bartlett. Published in Nathaniel P. Wallis, *Canadian Scenery Illustrated* (London, 1842), Volume 2.

den and see my friends" – and you would see the birds come flying to her & perch on her hand for crumbs. The squirrels too loved her & came at her call, she knew them all – they all knew her! When their frugal meal was over, this old lady would delve into the past; reciting ... incidents of historical interest, she was sure of her subject, history. It was her hobby – she was not interested in present day affairs, she knew every detail of her stories for they had to do with her own people & those before them. After you had heard you went away feeling a wee bit sad & sorry that people are not today as they were. Your conscience troubles but your admiration grows for you have had conference with Georgianna Fischer. Her little cottage is still standing, she was one of Lodewics [Lewis Fisher] descendants & our own Ann Hathaway.²⁶

26 PANB, MC 300, MS 2/144, York-Sunbury Historical Society fonds, Captain H.F.G. Woodbridge, "Episodes re. Forest Hill," paper to the York-Sunbury Historical Society, 21 March 1934, pp. 15a and 15b. I am indebted to Bob Guthrie of the Heritage Branch of the Government of New Brunswick, for telling me about this talk.



Figure 8 Picture of Georgianna Fisher’s home ca. 1930, built by Lewis Fisher ca. 1792 (PANB/P32–40). After his death it was sold to the Woodbridge family for five dollars.

My admiration for Georgianna Fisher has also grown tremendously, but it is tinged with regret that so few of these stories have found their way into written words that are preserved for future generations.²⁷

Some evidence in the manuscript itself suggests that Georgianna Fisher may, in fact, have been a great-granddaughter. Her mother Sarah was born in January 1800 when Georgianna’s grandmother, who had been born in 1749, would have been over fifty years of age. This was a very unlikely age at which to give birth in the eighteenth century! It is perhaps more likely that Sarah was an illegitimate daughter of an older “sister” and was passed off as the youngest “child” of the family, a device resorted to quite frequently by desperate families to conceal illegitimate births.²⁸ The manuscript tells us that Elizabeth, the second oldest daughter, who was born in 1777, went to the United States to visit her grandmother and married there, having thirteen children and not

²⁷ The speech by Captain Woodbridge and the untitled manuscript in her own hand are the only two examples I have found.

²⁸ Terrence Punch, *Genealogical Research in Nova Scotia*, 3d ed. (Halifax, 1983), pp. 108–9. Punch cautions genealogists to be wary of records which show women giving birth after age fifty for this reason.

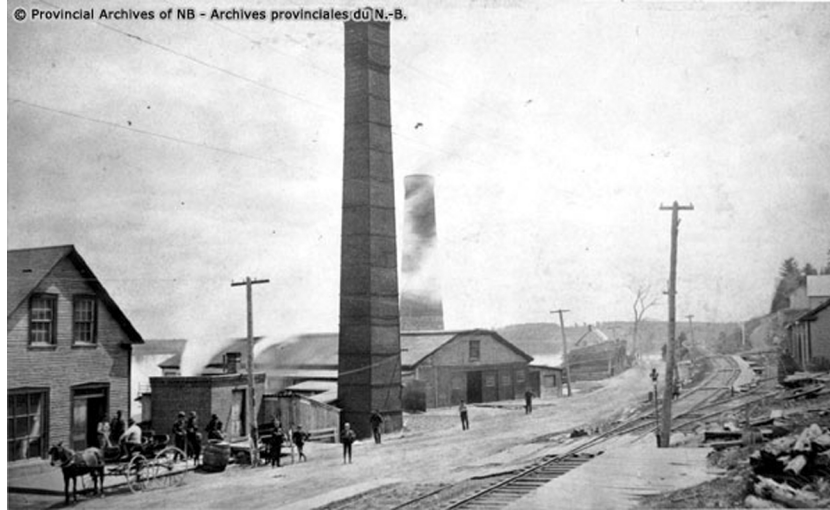


Figure 9 Picture of Morrison's Mill below Fredericton at the Port of Forest Hill. He was a friend of Georgianna Fisher, and the executor of her will. (PANB 132–133).

returning to New Brunswick. We will never know for certain if she was Sarah's real mother.

Georgianna Fisher's recollections have proved to be remarkably accurate where they can be corroborated against other evidence. My research has only turned up one minor error in the manuscript: her aunt Jane Blake died in December 1818 rather than February 1819.²⁹ Her rough style masked a reliable memory. It is clear from the pacing of the manuscript that she felt compelled to tell the story, and only stopped short when she had run out of paper. Georgianna Fisher died in 1897 in Fredericton, a year before William Fisher read his revised version to Raymond. Little else is known about Georgianna, except the strange circumstances of her last will and testament. Probate files show that she had left her home to John A. Morrison, a neighbour and local saw-mill proprietor, while land records show that she had already sold it in 1891 to Edwin Fisher, a wealthy cousin who lived in Saint John, in return for "one dollar and other valuable considerations." She kept the right to reside in her home. It will never be known if its inclusion in the will was brought on by the forgetfulness of old age or a shrewd manoeuvre by an aging woman. When she wrote her will on 6 August 1896, Edwin Fisher had been dead for over a year so she may have felt free to dispose of the home as she pleased. John

29 Daniel Johnson, ed., *Vital Statistics from New Brunswick Newspapers* 2 (475, 482). W.O. Raymond also remarked on its accuracy and published it almost verbatim from the lips of William Fisher.

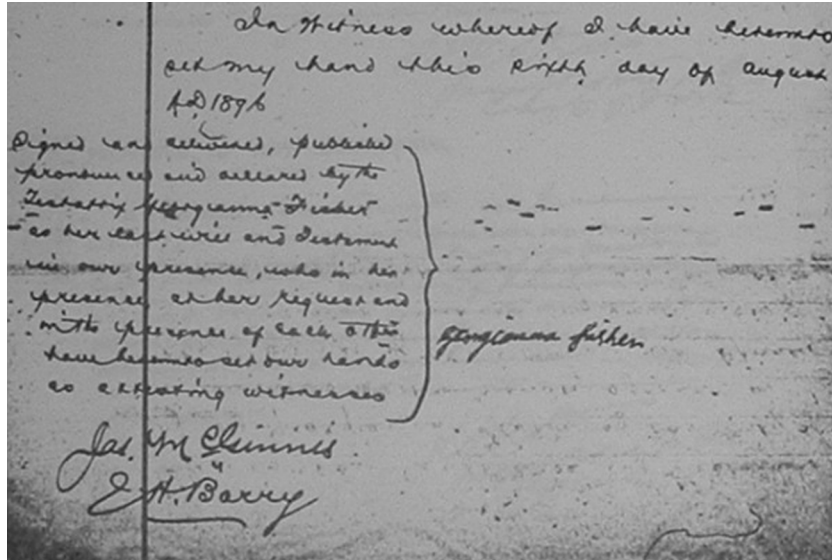


Figure 10 Picture of Georgianna Fisher’s signature on her will (PANB).

Morrison, her executor, did not discover the disputed ownership until settling her estate. When Edwin Fisher’s heirs did not step forward to claim the property, Morrison sold the home and land in 1898 to neighbour Jane Woodbridge for the nominal sum of five dollars.³⁰

William Fisher identified himself as the author of the revisions to Georgianna’s manuscript. But what parts did he revise? The most obvious difference is that the genealogical prologue of Georgianna’s manuscript is missing. It is not clear why he removed it but perhaps he thought that it would only interest the family and added nothing to the larger history of the coming of the loyalists. It is tempting to hope that most of the other revisions were cosmetic, but for the few paragraphs where the texts overlap, it is clear that he expanded some of the anecdotes. For example, Georgianna recalls of the original settlers that “the only living animal they found in the place was a black and white cat, it went from tent to tent and was welcome to all. It must have belonged to last inhabitants that was murdered by the Indians before they came.”³¹ William’s

30 PANB, RS75a, reel F11762, York County Probate Files, 1897 (Georgianna Fisher); and PANB, RS98, reel F5659, York County, Land Registry Office records (Georgianna Fisher). Edwin Fisher’s heir was his housekeeper Eliza Haggarty. Jane Woodbridge was the mother of the Captain Woodbridge who gave the speech to the York-Sunbury Historical Society about the history of Forest Hill.

31 PANB, MC 1, Fisher family file. An attack by the Indians is not improbable. During the Revo-

version reads, "There was not a living creature in the form of an animal to be seen about all the place with the exception of a black and white coloured cat which was a great pet among all the people there." These brief excerpts give some feel for the differing styles of the two authors, one lively and blunt, the other refined. William adds to the story, concluding it by saying that some men from the States came, killed, roasted, and ate the cat. That is just the sort of thing that Americans would do! In his version, bad men from the "States" figure in another incident. The loyalists themselves, of course, had come from the "States," which makes this accusation somewhat problematical. The rebels may have been a nasty lot but it seems unlikely that they pursued their victims to New Brunswick to murder and eat their pets. It does provide a glimpse of the hostility of the descendants of the loyalists 100 years later towards the United States. Given the extreme hunger of the settlers, however, it is not unlikely that the black and white cat came to a bad end.

If we accept that the two foolscap pages are all that Georgianna wrote, that the original manuscript is complete, then it is clear that William interpolated many of his own memories into the revised text. Comparison of the "Memorandum" and the "History and Reminiscences" typescripts with the photocopied manuscript at the Provincial Archives shows that after deleting the genealogical introduction he followed Georgianna's structure closely for the first nine paragraphs; generally expanding two or three lines from her narrative into a paragraph. The succeeding six pages are, however, fresh information provided by him. It is possible that he drew on memories from Georgianna and other surviving grandchildren like his sister Anne Connell (1809–1895), brother Lewis Peter Fisher (1821–1905), and cousin Edwin Fisher (1821–1895) in its composition. The surviving typescripts both have the phrase "Reminiscences of the Fisher Family" in the title, suggesting that it was the title of William's original manuscript which, perhaps, reflected a collective effort in remembering.

William Fisher was four years older than Georgianna Fisher and had grown up in Fredericton so doubtless he would have had his own memories of conversations with his grandmother, and heard many of the same stories time and again. The omissions and paucity of detail in Georgianna's two pages, and her apparent lack of ease with writing, may have prompted William to commit his own reminiscences to paper. His fidelity to her account is demonstrated by the way he followed her structure and preserved her name as author. One other clue that hints at a collective effort in remembering is provided when the revised ver-

lutionary War, the Maliseet Indians of the St. John River Valley changed sides several times between 1777 and 1780. Agents of both the Americans and the British worked among them diligently. Some New Englanders had settled in the vicinity after 1759 when the British burned the French village of St. Anne on the site of Fredericton. There were still three habitations standing when the loyalists came.

sion uses the words “I have heard my grandparents tell of the very extreme hardship they passed through so often. ...”³² Only two or three grandchildren alive in the 1880s and 1890s would have been old enough to remember their grandfather who had died in 1816, before William or Georgianna were born. Indeed, William’s mention of an older sister to Raymond could suggest the involvement of his sister Anne Connell who was born in 1809 and would have memories of her grandfather.³³ William’s revisions remind us of why the original manuscript is so valuable. His reminiscences are no less valid than Georgianna’s but with two narrators of Mary Barbara Fisher’s recollections our appreciation of the authentic voice of the grandmother is that much richer.

The W.O. Raymond papers in the New Brunswick Museum throw some more light on the historian’s role in preserving “The Grandmother’s Story.” Correspondence between W. Shives Fisher and Raymond in 1899 revealed that he wished to consult the original manuscript in order to verify the names of the other founding settlers of Fredericton:

I was looking today at the notes I made from a conversation with your father Wm. Fisher, based upon some rude notes he had in his possession that wer[e] given him, as I understood by an older sister. He was disposed to apologise for the appearance of these notes as they were not he thought very presentable because, as he said, the sister had enjoyed but limited advantages as regards early training. I am however really quite anxious to study these rude notes to ascertain the names of those she mentions as among the first settlers of Fredericton.³⁴

It seems that William deliberately misled Raymond to protect the identity of his cousin Georgianna and perhaps her illegitimacy. If Raymond had entertained any doubts that the sister of three lawyers, a Chief Superintendent of Education, and an Indian Commissioner, could have had but “limited advantages” in regards to education, he kept them to himself! From the accompanying files, it appears that they provided him both with a typescript of Georgianna’s notes and a typescript of William’s revised version. Whoever typed them, however, had trouble with the handwriting, in particular for the names of the other settlers, which are, for the most part, left blank.³⁵ This did

32 Georgianna Fisher and William Fisher, “Memorandum of the Fisher Family from 1783, Information and Reminiscences of the Fisher Family &c,” typescript in the possession of David and Ann Brown of Osgoode, Ontario.

33 Grandchildren who probably would have had memories of Lewis Fisher would have included William Fisher’s older siblings Anne Connell (1809–1895) and Charles Fisher (1808–1880), and his cousin Eunice Bowyer (1809–1883).

34 New Brunswick Museum (hereafter NBM), W.O. Raymond collection, F20–1, correspondence, W.O. Raymond to W. Shives Fisher, 10 June 1899.

35 NBM, W.O. Raymond collection, F20–1 and F20–2.

not deter the diligent Raymond who managed to discover and include the names of these pioneer loyalists in his 1899 article "Founders of Fredericton: The Story of a Grandmother." He remarked that nearly all of the names mentioned are also found in the muster rolls of the New Jersey Volunteers, confirming the veracity of the story. It also confirmed a story he had not credited before, the statement by an old hand that most of the names on the long since decayed headboards in the Royal Provincial Burial Place (used in the first decade or two after the arrival of the loyalists) were German or Dutch.³⁶

William Fisher's original manuscript has apparently not survived though his version has endured in the published account by W.O. Raymond, and in the archived typescripts in the Sir George Parkin fonds and John Fisher fonds. Still, who had the original manuscript written by Georgianna Fisher? Who had made the photocopy for the Provincial Archives in Fredericton? The Archives did not keep a record of additions to the family reference files. The presence of the photocopy suggested that it was still extant fairly recently, and that the owner recognized its historical value which boded well for its continued survival.

The grandmother's story is clearly of immense value for understanding Fisher family history and the early history of New Brunswick, but what are the larger implications of this story of mysterious manuscripts, archives, and family memory? Oral historians will find much in it that speaks to our contemporary concern with the transmission of memory through oral traditions versus the role of written text. Advocates of both forms of communication would find much grist for their mills. Without the careful storytelling of Mary Barbara Fisher and the shared memories of her grandchildren in the late nineteenth century, none of this story would have survived. Similarly, without the efforts of Georgianna Fisher and William Fisher to record their grandmother's stories of the founding of Fredericton in written words, it is unlikely that any of her reminiscences would have survived in the family through oral transmission alone to the twenty-first century. Closer examination of the two texts might reveal that the concerns of Canadians in the 1880s and 1890s had crept secretly into the oral traditions before or while they were fixed on paper in writing.

The grandmother's story speaks to our contemporary concern with voice and the appropriation of voice. Feminist scholars might read in the manuscript and its revision and retelling by William Fisher, Rev. W.O. Raymond, and Captain H.F.G. Woodbridge, a struggle by Mary Barbara Fisher and Georgianna Fisher to make their voices heard against the efforts of these men to appropriate and sublimate their voices in the master narrative of subduing the wilderness and constructing a patriarchal society. Historians of a contrary

36 LAC, Sir George Parkin fonds, MG 30 D44, vol. 76, Genealogy file, W.O. Raymond, "Founders of Fredericton. The Story of a Grandmother," pp. 25, 224–25, 229.

bent could argue that these members of the masculine elite recognized the value and ensured the survival of their feminine voices. Still, others might see it as proof that the bonds of family are stronger than those of gender, class, or time.

This story also holds valuable lessons for archivists. Genealogists are perhaps the most numerous and dedicated users of archives though traditionally archivists have dismissed their work as amateur or of purely personal value, with no larger benefit to society. This group, however, is growing rapidly and is increasingly well-educated, reflecting the changing demographics of Canada. Genealogists in pursuit of knowledge about their ancestors are engaging in more scholarly research. Some are pushing the bounds of traditional family history outward by adopting sophisticated approaches, seeking answers to questions about family relationships, household and daily life, migration and kinship ties, commemoration and memory.³⁷ The gap is narrowing between family history and academic disciplines like social history and women's studies which are casting their gaze upon the private spheres of home and family to understand the lived experience of ordinary men, women, and children. While most genealogists will continue to do research with a narrow focus, in the coming years archivists will have to rethink some of their cherished notions about this large and evolving research community.

Georgianna Fisher's manuscript also reminds archivists of the critical value of research in archival practice. Thorough research into the history and context of this manuscript revealed the identity of its anonymous author and illuminated its invisible ties to documents in other archives and private hands, and published works. Without this knowledge, the photocopy is only the rough draft of a family tree, suitable only for deposit in a reference file at an archives. With an understanding of its creation and use, the archivist can write the custodial history, biographical sketch, and item-level description that will enable future researchers to have access to this remarkable document and accept its authenticity. How many other mysterious manuscripts do we have waiting in our vaults for their stories to be told? With the resource constraints on archives today, time for in-depth research into the records is increasingly a scarce luxury, but I would argue that such research is essential for us to main-

37 In Atlantic Canada, Terrence Punch, Allan Marble, Allen Robertson, George Hayward, and others have set high standards for genealogical research. See Terrence Punch, *Genealogical Research in Nova Scotia*, the genealogical sections of the *Journal of the Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society*, the old *Nova Scotia Historical Review*, and *Generations: Journal of the New Brunswick Genealogical Society*, especially when Hayward was editor in the 1990s. For examples of genealogical migration studies see my articles "Tracing Strays from Atlantic Canada, 1860–1920," *Family Chronicle* 7, no. 4 (March/April 2003), pp. 37–40, and "The Exodus from New Brunswick: Tracing the Out-Migration of the Descendants of Lewis Fisher and Mary Barbara Till, 1860–1920," *Generations* 21, no. 3 (Fall 1999), pp. 39–41.

tain our status as a knowledge-creating profession and fulfill our obligation to society as the keepers of memory.

In tracing the descendants of Lewis and Mary Barbara Fisher, I have been in contact with dozens of distant and not-so distant relatives. It was one of these contacts that led me to the discovery of the original manuscript. Upon hearing a description of the manuscript from me, Joan Golding Marien, of Montreal, confirmed that her late mother Kathleen Fisher Golding, a devoted genealogist, had tucked the original document safely away in a box of family treasures. She intended to give it to the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick on a future visit to Fredericton but first brought it to Ottawa for me to examine. What a thrill to hold the delicate and faded manuscript in my hands! Its surface bore the stains of a century or more of life – discolourations, tears along the lines of its folds, and crude repairs with Scotch tape. But it still seemed so much more alive than the mechanical reproduction, its texture forging a tangible link to my family's past.

I gleaned no new knowledge from the original manuscript but its very existence further confirmed the veracity of the photocopy's content by imbuing it with known provenance and context. Still after so many years, finding the original manuscript hidden in the suburbs of Montreal was in some ways anticlimactic. The most significant discoveries had been made, not in reaching the destination, but in the voyage itself. A voyage revealing the role of oral tradition and the written word in the shaping of memory, collective remembering and storytelling, the transmission of memory through generations of family, and the invisible threads that have bound us together through time. Thanks to the memories and written words of her grandchildren, Mary Barbara Fisher's voice still speaks to us across the centuries with vitality undiminished.

APPENDIX

Manuscript Versions of the Grandmother's Story

- A *Untitled [The Grandmother's Story]*. The original manuscript recollections of Georgianna Fisher of her conversations with her grandmother, Mary Barbara (Till) Fisher, 2 pp., prepared ca. 1879–1886 and currently in the possession of Joan Golding Marien of Montreal, great-granddaughter of William Fisher. A photocopy of Ms. A is held in the MC 1 family histories reference collection at the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick in Fredericton.
- B *Untitled typescript of Ms. A*. Prepared in 1899 for W.O. Raymond by W. Shives Fisher. It is part of the W.O. Raymond fonds at the New Brunswick Museum in Saint John.
- C *[Reminiscences of the Fisher Family, &c]*. Revised and expanded manuscript prepared by William Fisher from Ms. A in the 1880s or 1890s. Its

present location is unknown. It was read to Rev. W.O. Raymond by William Fisher in 1898 and survives largely intact in Raymond's 1899 paper "The Story of a Grandmother" and 1917 article "Peter Fisher: The First Historian of New Brunswick," and in the typescript versions listed below (from which a partial title is surmised).

- D *Memorandum of the Fisher Family from 1783, Information and Reminiscences of the Fisher Family &c.* Typescript prepared from Ms. C, probably by W. Shives Fisher in 1899. Authorship is attributed to Georgianna Fisher, granddaughter, with revisions by William Fisher, grandson, 9 pp. (double-spaced). A copy is held in the W.O. Raymond fonds at the New Brunswick Museum.
- E *History and Reminiscences of the Fisher Family, &c. &c.* The typescript prepared from Ms. C, probably by Annie Connell Parkin, ca. 1900–1930, 5 pp., that is preserved in the Sir George Parkin fonds (MG 30, D44) at the Library and Archives of Canada.

The Grandmother's Story

(Note: Punctuation has been inserted by the editor but the spelling and capitalization have not been altered. Where the original manuscript is not clear, the editor has inserted his best guess in square brackets.)

Lewis Fisher was the eldest son of Michel Fisher and Maria. There was eight brothers and one sister Ann and the sons Peter david Rynhard Conrad herman [Marinus] and Michel. Lewis married in 1772 to Mary Barbara Till daughter of George Till born in germany. They had twelve children five sons and 7 daughters Mary Eliza henry Peter david Ann Nancy and Sophia twins Jane Lewis Michel and Sarah. Lewis Fisher was one of the loyalists he came to this province the 8th of October 1783 after the war with his wife and three children. Mary the first born April 13 1777[4] they left with her grandmother elizabeth born 1777 henry 1780 Peter 1782 david 1785 Ann 1787 Nancy and Sophia 1791 Jane 1793 Lewis 1795 michel born 30th March 1797 and Sarah Jan 18 1800. Lewis Fisher died 13 April 1816 aged 76 Mary his Wife died the 15 feb 1841 aged 92 they both lay in the old burial grounds in fredericton together with their two sons Lewis and Peter, two daughters Jane and Sarah, and their sons wives.

henrys first wife was Mary Sewell left six children annie Michel mary elizabeth Jane Gabriel. Lewis his first wife was Sophia Mills the 2th wife was Mrs elizabeth Peterson daughter of Mr. Payson merchant of fredericton he had no children Michel's first wife was rebekah Murry daughter of Solomon Murry farmer of new maryland his 2th Ann Merrit of St John his children two by the first three by the last he is buried with his first wife's family not with his father and mother. Jane was married to henry Blake of Vermont in 1815 died feb

1819. Sophia died 1794 buried in the provincials burial ground. Jane had two sons Henry Lewis and David. They lay in our burial place 16 of our family lies there Nancy was married 29 October to Richard Earl of Waterbury merchant there she had seven daughters Henry's 2th wife was Mrs Rebekah Lawrence their children 15 makes 21 Mary was married to Michel Misinger in the States her children three Elizabeth went there to see her grandmother and was married to James Taylor. She had 13 children.

When Lewis Fisher came here it was a wilderness there were only three houses in the place and they were old. When he arrived at St John after a tiresome journey by sea and land he did not like the place so he thought it best to come up with the others who came they got a schooner to bring them on to Fredericton but when they had been eight days coming on their way they arrived at Oromocto the captain refusing to come further up river saying as he was a stranger on the river he would be lost in the wilderness so he landed them all out on the shore he charged them four dollars a head and would not be paid to come up and turned around & [then] went back and left them they stopped all night there the next day not wishing to remain in that dismal place they again set out on their journey finding some canoes the Indians or some others had left some came on the water and some on the shore so not to get out of sight of each other so on the 8th of October they arrived at their home that was and pitched tents for the winter on what is now called Salamanca as it was very wet and cold Winter was coming so fast they had no time to build and nothing to build with or to make a floor but the ground.

[Among] the men that pitched tents there near Lewis Fisher McComiskey/ three Riddners/ Burkstaff/ Doct Earl/ Donley/ Wolly/ Acton/ King/ Swim/ Kain/ Ackerman/ Ackerman/ Vanderbeck/ Coaty/ Hemlong/ Smith/ Buchanan on the road that now is below Rosehall was more tents the names Roach/ Decelency/ Augden/ Patterson/ Esington/ Rivers/ Simpson many more on the flats the Winter was very cold many died women and children young and old the men set out with to look for a place to bury their dead with axes and spades they found a clear spot on the place afterwards known as the Parker's land now Mr Ketchum owns it they gave it the name of the royal provincial burial place and many of them lie there. It was a hard winter to those that had left good homes.

My grandmother said the snow came early and the winter was one of the hardest she ever seen but the neighbours all was kind to each other the only living animal they found in the place was a black and white cat it went from tent to tent and was welcome to all it must have belonged to last inhabitants that was murdered by the Indians before they came I got this statement from her and much more I could tell of all they passed through before Fredericton was called a town.