The *Bluenose* and the American schooner *Eagle* race in 1921. The International Fisherman’s Trophy Race grew out of decades of interaction between Maritime and New England fishing fleets in the waters of the Northeast. COURTESY F. W. WALLACE PHOTOGRAPHS, MARITIME MUSEUM OF THE ATLANTIC.
Borderlands, Baselines and Bearhunters: Conceptualizing the Northeast as a Sporting Region in the Interwar Period

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Borderlands, Interwar Baseball and Bear-Hunts! Brother Matthias, Babe Ruth, Bluenose sailors, and Boston Marathoners. A few decades later in 1967 Canadian songwriter Bobby Gimby celebrated national allegiance and Canada’s 100th birthday with his song “Ca-Na-Da,” and residents of Canada’s Maritime Provinces frequently sang along as they headed for Maine in search of bargains at the Bangor Mall. What to make of all this? Is there a unifying element in these diffuse examples of popular culture in the northeastern borderlands, from sport to song to shopping expeditions? While contemplating this question, I was led inexorably to other more fundamental concerns. What happens when we place borderland sporting life at the center of our historical gaze rather than at the periphery? To what extent can or should we disconnect sport history from narratives of nation-building or metropolitan dominance? Does sporting life in hinterland or borderland

†The author wishes to acknowledge the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council in this borderlands research project. Thanks as well to research assistant Daniel MacDonald for his research into the career of Johnny Miles, and to Rosalie Francis for information on guiding meets.
regions simply replicate the experience of sport in metropolitan centers, as some have suggested? Or, do places on the economic, social and geographical margins present other, more ambiguous meanings that merit more attention from sport historians than they have received to date?

That these are neither frivolous nor self-indulgent concerns is attested to by the growing scholarly preoccupation with economic, social and cultural life in borderland regions throughout the world.¹ Connected to the larger process of globalization, the considerable mobility of peoples, ideas and capital, and the seeming fragility and impermanence of existing nation states, the interest in boundaries and borderlands reveals a growing fascination with questions of cultural and ethnic identity (or identities) and issues of national integrity and dissolution. It also reflects the contemporary uneasiness with older grand narratives of national development. Nations, we have been repeatedly told in recent years, are invented or imagined communities,² suggesting the possibility of their re-invention or re-imagining in ways quite different from how they are perceived in the present. So too with borderlands. In our own day borders have become an increasing preoccupation amidst growing concerns about national security and the development of the global economy.

Of course, to regard both nations and transnational borderland communities as imagined constructs raises some important theoretical and methodological problems. Just what constitutes a borderland region, and what are its borders? Nations have explicit geographical boundaries, constitutional arrangements, and political, military and legal institutions. By contrast, borderlands are defined by shifting currents of cultural, economic and social interaction, from relatively unimpeded collaboration among residents on both sides of a border to outright hostility and war. In addition, the nature and even the imagined boundaries of borderlands can change significantly over time. No doubt it is this fluid, indeterminate and ill-defined character of the "borderlands" concept, reminiscent of the idea of the "frontier" as it has been applied in the history of the United States,³ that has led social scientists to offer typologies of borderland relationships that purport to make those shifting, ambiguous and complex relationships more understandable. Oscar Martinez, a leading borderlands scholar, for example, categorizes borderlands as either "alienated, co-existent, interdependent or integrated" and concludes that the Mexican borderlands has moved from alienation to co-existence and interdependence over time.⁴ In similar fashion, Alan Klein locates his study of baseball in the two Laredos on the Texas-Mexican border within what he considers the three presentations of nationalism in borderland situations: autonationalism, binationalism, and transnationalism.⁵

In the United States borderland scholarship has focused almost exclusively on the southwestern borderlands, as though it is the only borderland relationship worthy of serious investigation. Recent work by Sheila McManus on the transformation of Blackfoot country into the Alberta-Montana borderlands in the late nineteenth century,⁶ and by Stephen Hornsby, John Reid and others on the northeastern borderlands,⁷ has suggested the utility of the "borderlands model" in understanding relationships across the Canadian-American border as well. Not surprisingly, the conclusions to be drawn from such an approach are quite different in the north than in the south. Among other things, what distinguishes the Canadian-American from the Mexican-American borderlands is the simple
fact that a vast majority of Canadians live within one hundred miles of the border with the United States, making the country in some respects a vast borderland community, or an archipelago of borderland regions. Of course, many Canadians and a sizeable number of the country's historians would balk at such a characterization, preferring to conceive of their relationship with the United States as that of two sovereign nations living side by each. The point to be noted in all this is that these two positions represent collective yet divergent representations of community and national identities; their existence should prompt us to extend Benedict Anderson’s idea of the nations as "imagined" entities to include the concept of a borderland as an invented space.

The essay that follows is a case study of how a region spanning the northeastern border between Canada and the United States, including Massachusetts and Maine in New England and Nova Scotia and New Brunswick in Canada's Maritime region, imagined itself a coherent sporting community during the interwar period. This was by no means an aberrant or eccentric proposition but was connected to a long-standing relationship that existed in spite of boundaries or countervailing political allegiances. From the time of exploration and initial colonization, this borderland region has experienced a complex relationship involving economic and military rivalries, migrations back and forth of its peoples, and continuing social and cultural contact. In the colonial period, Acadia and later Nova Scotia (which at the time included present day New Brunswick) was thought of by many as "New England’s outpost." Massachusetts merchants in particular were interested in establishing an economic hammerlock over the mainland of Acadia/Nova Scotia and expelling the French from the Cape Breton fortress of Louisbourg. After the defeat of the French at Louisbourg and Quebec and the subsequent Loyalist migration to the region at the time of the American Revolution, a less dependent relationship emerged, although Boston continued to exercise a measure of metropolitan influence throughout the nineteenth century. After Confederation, economic dislocation accompanied the transition from a sea-based, export-oriented economy to a new industrial and manufacturing one and occasioned widespread out-migration from the Maritimes, much of it destined for the so-called "Boston States." This exodus to New England continued until well after the First World War, fuelled by the de-industrialization of the Maritime Provinces that followed the temporary prosperity of wartime production. It was in this setting of economic difficulty and amidst a widespread conviction that Confederation had not fulfilled its promises to the Maritimes that the conception of the region as a transnational sporting community flourished in the interwar period.

One possible starting point for the discussion of borderlands sport that follows is the recent literature on the diffusion process. Sport historians and sociologists often argue that sporting culture radiates from developed metropolitan societies outward to the rest of the world, enters host cultures at the elite level then descends through the social order to eventually reach the working class and common people. But top down approaches to the development of popular culture often overlook the complexity of the lived social, cultural and economic experience of local communities or hinterland regions, where history is made "on the ground" so to speak. Of course, these two orientations need not be mutually exclusive and may even be symbiotic. What motivates my work, however, is the assumption that the history of peoples on the margins, their cultural creativity or agency if
you like, is neither fully dependent upon nor independent of their relationship to the nation or the metropolis. In this sense metropolitan intentions, while important, never fully trump the imagination of the periphery. The relationship between metropolis and hinterland is a dialectical one, continually negotiated and renegotiated, imagined and re-imagined. And nowhere is this fluidity more evident than in the production of culture in transnational borderland communities.

My discussion of barnstorming baseballists, bear-hunters, Bluenose sailors and Boston Marathoners in the northeastern corner of North America is meant to shed light on how one transnational borderland community—at least for a time—imagined itself. I am going to argue that baseball, hunting, the competitive international races involving the schooner Bluenose, and a preoccupation of a generation of Maritimers with the Boston Marathon were essential components of an interwar conceptualization of the northeast as a coherent, transnational sporting region. This sense of a shared sporting culture continued into the postwar era amidst the Cold War hostility directed toward the Soviet bloc by Canadians and Americans alike. By the 1960s, however, new nationalist discourses in Canada, including Bobby Gimby's musical testimony to Canadian Confederation, cries for a more independent Canadian foreign policy in the wake of the United States' adventurism in Vietnam, and new patterns of consumption in an increasingly consumer-oriented culture—evident in the development of shopping centers like the Bangor Mall—altered earlier configurations of sport and leisure in the northeastern borderlands. New allegiances were forged between the Atlantic Provinces and the rest of Canada after World War II with the entrance of Newfoundland into Confederation in 1949, the extension of the welfare state, the coming of Medicare, and an increasing federal government presence in the field of sport and recreation in Canada. These changes were not simply the product of a new triumphant Canadian metropolitanism that absorbed a compliant Maritime hinterland but had come at least in part as a result of demands from the region for a better deal within Confederation over the years. At the same time, the response of the Canadian state to the issue of regional disparity and social inequality, along with the revitalization of a consumer-oriented culture after two decades of depression and wartime shortages, strengthened the allegiance of Atlantic Canada to Confederation. It also ushered in new forms of cultural interaction between the Maritimes and New England and brought an end to an imagined transnational sporting region.

Barnstormers

In 1936, just a year after his retirement from baseball, Babe Ruth climbed aboard the S.S. Atlantic in Portland, Maine, for a vacation trip to Nova Scotia. After arriving in Yarmouth, Ruth spent a few days in the southwestern part of the province playing golf at the Digby Pines golf course. He then drove through the Annapolis Valley to Halifax before travelling to Westville in Pictou County to give a hitting exhibition. Although many Nova Scotians still recall this visit and a future one in 1942 in which Ruth helped open the new Navy recreation center in Halifax, Ruth’s connection to the Maritimes, as we shall see, was more than simply incidental.
roustabouts and waterfront drifters. Considered an "incorrigible youth" Ruth was consigned for much of his childhood to the Saint Mary’s Industrial School for boys, a reform school run by the Xaverian brothers religious order. The brothers had a lasting influence on Ruth. "It was at St. Mary’s that I met and learned to love the greatest man I’ve ever known," Ruth wrote in his autobiography, "... Brother Matthias of the Xaverian order." The son of a mining engineer, Brother Matthias was born Martin Leo Boutilier in Lingan, Cape Breton. He and his older brother had both grown up playing pick-up baseball before entering the Xaverian brotherhood and followed many of their Maritime compatriots before World War I down the road to the “Boston States.” In addition, a number of Ruth’s major league colleagues had family in the Maritimes, among them future Hall of
Famers Harry Hooper whose father was a Prince Edward Island ships captain, and Harold "Pie" Traynor whose father Jimmy had lived in Halifax before moving to Framingham, Massachusetts. John Phalen "Stuffy" MacInnes of Gloucester, a member of the Philadelphia Athletics famed "one hundred thousand dollar infield," also had family roots in Cape Breton and would return to coach semi-pro baseball for a time after his retirement from professional baseball. And finally, Ruth’s first wife Helen Woodford, whom he met in South Boston, had grown up in Nova Scotia and joined her family in the southward exodus from the Maritimes to Boston.

Had he not retired from baseball early in the 1935 season, Ruth would no doubt have come to Nova Scotia with the Boston Braves when they visited the province later that summer to play the Maritime champion Yarmouth Gateways. A mid-season junket to the Maritimes by a major league team would be incomprehensible today, but in the interwar years this was part of a broad tradition of itinerant baseball barnstorming that drew the northeast together as a sporting region, a tradition which would not die out until the 1950s. Both of Boston’s major league clubs, the Braves and the Red Sox, regarded northern New England and the Maritimes as their hinterland and asserted that claim through numerous tours of the region and in their promotional materials. These visits usually took place at season’s end, but in 1935 the Braves came north to St. Stephen, New Brunswick, in the middle of their summer schedule with the express purpose of challenging the Maritime champion; they repeated the process in coming to Yarmouth the following summer.

Baseball connections between the Maritimes and New England developed early. Before 1900 traveling teams from Boston and close-by towns such as Haverford, Dorchester, Lowell, as well as from Portland, Augusta, and Bangor in Maine helped create a shared baseball culture within which the border played a rather insignificant role. Various semi-professional leagues also spanned the border. In 1912, for example, the Saint John Marathons, champions of the Maine-New Brunswick league, played a three-game series against the Lowell club of the New England League in what was billed as the minor league baseball championship of the Maritimes and New England.

After the war New England teams flooded the region. In addition to the Braves and Red Sox, Eddie Carr’s Auburn club, Bob Bigney’s South Boston All-Stars, Dick Casey’s Neposnett All-Stars, the James A. Roche team of Everett, Massachusetts, Frank Silva’s Connecticut Yankees, and touring teams from Arlington, Dorchester, Quincy, Newburyport, Somerville, Malden, Salem, Taunton and Attleboro would turn Maritime ball diamonds into “burned over districts” of New England baseball barnstorming. They were joined, moreover, by various assemblages of African-American ballplayers from the so-called Negro leagues: Chappie Johnson’s Travelling All-stars, the Philadelphia Coloured Giants, the New York Black Yankees, the Ethiopian Clowns and the Zulu Cannibal Giants all barnstormed the province. Without question the most popular of the black ball teams was Burlin White’s Boston Royal Giants, who returned to the Maritimes year after year during the thirties, playing over 300 games against predominantly white local teams. Despite the carnivalesque nature of these tours, baseball fans in the Maritimes responded warmly to the Royal Giants, creating in the process an idealized image of the northeast as a region with a shared sporting identity that transcended both the border and the racial divide.
This romanticized transnationalism, of course, stood in contrast to the discourses of betrayal and regional neglect involving the place of the Maritimes within Confederation, which had been given political expression in the Maritime Rights movement. Indeed, the language of regional discontent on one hand and the imagined intimacy with New England on the other, resonated throughout the interwar years in the sporting pages of Maritime newspapers. There was more to this than just discourse or an imagined isolation from the rest of Canada. The isolation was real! Indeed, while barnstorming New England ball teams were a daily summertime occurrence throughout the region, the visit of the Montreal Dow team for two games in 1935 marks the only instance of a Canadian team playing in the Maritimes reported in the region’s newspapers during the entire period from the turn of the century to the Second World War! Baseball thus encouraged Maritimers to invent and romanticize the northeast as an idyllic and shared cultural space, at the very time that they regarded their place within Confederation as difficult and contested. From the outside, New Englanders often viewed the Maritimes as a “sportsman’s paradise”; the rest of Canada was more likely to harbor notions of Maritime backwardness, conservatism and economic lethargy.

Bearhunters

Romantic images of northern New England and the Maritimes as a sportsman’s paradise were commonplace in the interwar years, especially in local newspapers which delighted in recounting hunting junkets involving American sporting celebrities. The *Sydney Record* of November 13, 1925, for example, reported on a moose hunting trip "40 miles into the wilds of Canada"—more specifically into New Brunswick—involving the Babe and three of his ball-playing buddies. Apparently Ruth did not impress his native guide because he could only walk the first fifteen miles into the bush and needed a horse to complete the other twenty-five. He did, however, bag his moose and later regaled the press with his triumph. "As soon as I can get a freight train to carry the head back and get it stuffed I'll show it to you," Ruth gloated. "Yankee Stadium is the only place big enough to hold it."

Two years later the press reported upon another post-season moose-hunting trip by a group of players from the World Series champion Yankees. The entourage also included William Slocum of the *New York Evening Telegram* and Dr. J. Wolford, a big game hunter and baseball devotee from Philadelphia. Wolford had led another group of baseball stars on an earlier New Brunswick hunting expedition near Clarendon on the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) that bagged four bull moose and five deer. This was reputedly the same territory that heavyweight boxer Jack Dempsey had stalked a few years before and where, in the words of one reporter "the fistic star knocked out his first moose." There are a number of similar reports of baseball big game hunters and celebrities such as Zane Grey, Gene Tunney, Jack Sharkey, Ernest Hemingway, John D. Rockefeller, Dizzy Dean, Ethel DuPont and Amelia Earhardt tramping the woods, frequenting the fishing grounds of Maine and the Maritimes or, after 1937, taking part in the International Tuna Cup matches at Wedgeport, Nova Scotia. Much later, Boston Red Sox star Ted Williams purchased a summer camp on the Miramichi River in order to carry on his avocation as a fly fisherman.
As American sporting tourists sought out Maritime fishing and hunting grounds in increasing numbers, they brought much needed revenue to a bourgeoning tourist industry and created a significant market for knowledgeable woodsmen (and women)—many of whom were Mi’kmaq or Maliseet Indians—who could serve as licensed guides. Provincial guide associations had been established in both Nova Scotia and New Brunswick after the war to prevent indiscriminate and illegal killing of game and to obtain the best possible economic benefits for guides across the region. These associations contributed admirably to fish and game management but are best remembered for the sporting competitions that accompanied the annual meetings of the associations. Before the Great War there had been occasional prize competitions among guides involving trap and rifle shooting, swimming, canoe races, log rolling and chopping, and fly casting, but these were sparsely attended events. During the interwar period, however, guide meets drew large crowds and provided significant prize money for participants. In a weeklong meet at Lake William in Nova Scotia in the early thirties, for example, daily crowds of 5,000 or more watched guides compete in forty separate events. By the early thirties guide competitions had spread from the Maritimes into Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and Massachusetts and culminated in a hunting and fishing show and guides’ tournament in Boston in 1934 and 1935 with prizes totaling $10,000 each year. Held before packed houses at the Boston Gardens that was transformed into a hunting camp including trees, animals, tents, and supposedly the "largest indoor lake ever constructed," almost 100 guides from the Maritimes and New England competed in twenty-six events.

As Ian McKay has pointed out, the period between the wars had witnessed a reconceptualization of the Maritimes as an idyllic place, a more authentic and simple location with a population living closer to nature than people did in the bustling modern cities of North America. Guiding meets presented this image not only to New Englanders who visited the Maritimes but also to metropolitan residents in cities such as Boston, Hartford, and Providence. At the same time, stories of celebrity hunting and fishing excursions to the Maritimes reinforced musings about the region as a haven for American capitalists, who in their seeking out the recuperative benefits of a natural paradise, might come to recognize the potential for future resource development. Before the First World War, the Maritimes had shared the hope of industrial progress with most North Americans and envisioned a future of technological transformation and prosperous modernity, a hope that was dashed as the postwar Maritime economy collapsed. In the wake of de-industrialization and the consequent economic distress of the 1920s and 30s, the language of industrial progress and modernity, which had predominated earlier, gave way to anti-modernist assumptions of the virtue and innocence of the maritime folk.

Ironically, this romanticization of rural innocence also carried with it the desire for commercial improvement. According to Beatrice Hay Shaw’s *Nova Scotia: For Beauty and Business*, a 1923 publication promoting the province and its untapped resources, American businessmen would find here a respite from the hectic demands of business life and a resource base ready to be exploited and developed. Shaw’s allusions bordered on the salacious. Nova Scotia was depicted as the innocent blue-nosed lady-in-waiting sitting patiently while longing for “the man of rod and gun.’ At this moment . . . [she] holds her arms outspread, and bears her rich bosom to the world, calling to it to come and receive nourishment and life from her ripe breasts.”
The above needs little elaboration, and I'll leave it to others to deconstruct the sexual imagery that characterizes it. Suffice it to say, that in the interwar conceptualization of the northeast as a sporting region, Maritimers created a discourse that married anti-modernist assumptions about regional simplicity to a cautious hope of a future transformed by modern technology and marketplace opportunities. Discourses about sport and recreation easily lent themselves to this blending of tradition and modernity. As Maritimers turned sport into the folklore of regional simplicity, they sought out the advantages of commercialized spectacles such as the Boston guide meets and developed sophisticated promotions to attract tourists to the region. While promoting their region as a "sportsman's paradise" and as a tourist escape, most Maritimers also identified with an increasingly professionalized sporting culture that they associated with a rapidly urbanizing and sophisticated New England lifestyle.

**Boston Marathoners**

For many Maritimers, Boston symbolized modernity and opportunity and served as a safety valve for those unable to make a living in hardscrabble communities throughout the eastern provinces. Centuries of economic interaction beginning in the seventeenth century and widespread out-migration in the decades following Confederation reinforced Boston’s metropolitan connection to its Maritime hinterland. In the interwar period, moreover, Boston seemed more benign than either Montreal or Toronto. While Toronto and Montreal were often criticized for their predatory behavior in an age of de-industrialization and while the rhetoric of Maritime Rights in the twenties and thirties attributed the failures of Confederation to Central Canada’s broken promises, Boston and its surrounding communities were literally a second home to many Maritimers.²⁹

Boston’s benign metropolitan influence helps explain Maritimers’ fascination with the Boston Marathon. Before World War I, eastern Canadians were prominent competitors at the Boston race. In 1898 Canadian Ronald MacDonald, a student at Boston College, won the event. Two years later a Canadian contingent led by John Caffery of Hamilton took first, second and third place. Caffery won again in 1901. Then in 1907 Hamilton-based Onandaga runner Tom Longboat captured the crown. Three years later, Fred Cameron of Amherst, Nova Scotia, became the first Boston Marathon champion to hail from the Maritime Provinces, leading the race from beginning to end.³⁰

Nova Scotia’s interest in the Boston race intensified during the 1920s, spurred on by the remarkable success of homebred marathoners Victor MacAulay of Windsor, Silas McLellan from nearby Noel in Hants County, and Billy Taylor and Johnny Miles from Sydney Mines. Of the four, Miles was the most accomplished, winning the event in 1926 and again in 1929, becoming in the words of local sportswriter Gee Ahearne “the long distance champion runner of the world.” Although the victories of Miles overshadowed the careers of MacAulay, McLellan and Taylor, it is nonetheless worth remembering that Maritimers in the 1920s and 1930s applauded the accomplishments of all of these fine runners. MacAulay’s top five finish in the 1924 Boston Marathon catapulted him to a spot on the Canadian Olympic team that year. In 1925 he returned to Boston and finished a respectable seventh. Just two weeks after Miles’s victory in the 1926 Boston Marathon, McLellan won the annual Italian Athletic Association ten-mile marathon in Lynn, Massa-
Maritime involvement in the Boston Marathon contributed to the imagining of the northeast as a coherent transnational sporting region. It also gave vent to the ambivalent allegiances and deep frustrations that accompanied postwar economic decline. Not only the marathoneers themselves but the newspapermen who reported upon them constructed stories that reinforced contemporary discourses about regional identity, national betrayal and Maritime Rights. In many ways, Maritime sporting heroes and officials of the Maritime Provinces Amateur Athletic Association (MPAAA) became stalking horses of postwar Maritime regionalism. In the summer of 1924, for example, Victor MacAulay charged that Maritime athletes on the Canadian Olympic team had been discriminated against by head coach J.R. Cornelius. MacAuley complained that he had to wear running shoes that were two sizes too large for him and that Maritimers had received poor lodgings in comparison with athletes from central Canada and the West. Charges of this sort led J.G. Quigley of the MPAAA to attend a meeting of the Canadian Amateur Athletic Union (C.A.A.U.) in 1925 where he called for "Maritime Rights" for this region's athletes. Silas McLellan lodged a similar complaint to that of Victor MacAulay during the 1928 Olympics. The third Canadian to finish in the Olympic marathon that year, McLellan complained that officials of the Canadian Olympic committee woke him up at 11 o’clock at night to give him a rub-down and made him sleep in a room with five others, prompting A.C. Pettipas, the Maritime representative on the Canadian Olympic Committee, to protest McLellan’s shabby treatment.

The issues of regional alienation and allegiance, not to mention the difficulties involved in making a living in a chronically depressed region where the British Empire Steel Corporation (BESCO)—the main employer in industrial Cape Breton—teetered on financial ruin, were equally evident in the career of Nova Scotia's premiere marathoner of the interwar period. When Johnny Miles, a nineteen-year-old delivery boy from Sydney Mines, won the Boston Marathon in 1926 in his first marathon competition, he became an immediate hero in his native province. For young working-class men such as Miles, running offered an economically inexpensive means of exercise since it required only a pair of shoes and the time and space to train, and victory in a big event could lead to a steady job. At the same time, the more accomplished one became the heavier became the financial costs associated with training. Unlike team sports such as hockey, football, baseball and lacrosse, track and field provided little chance to make money from competition, and amateur athletes like Miles found themselves dependent upon financial support from the community in order to defray the cost of travel and accommodation. In 1926, for example, he received financial assistance from his hometown and from the Cape Breton Club of Boston before rewarding his supporters with victory in the big race.

After Johnny and his parents returned from Boston they were thrown into a dizzying whirl of local functions throughout Sydney Mines, North Sydney, Glace Bay and Sydney.
They also were inundated with invitations to compete in races across the Maritimes and New England. While he could not compete in them all, he did contest nineteen major races until winter brought the 1926 racing season to a merciful close. The price of success was high. In return for financial support and media coverage, Johnny and his family were expected to participate in the maintenance of their communities, whether local, provincial or regional. The strain of this implied social contract, when combined with Johnny’s hunger for success, took its inevitable toll. On June 12, less than two months after his victory in Boston, Johnny collapsed two hundred and twenty yards from the finish line in a ten-mile race in Melrose, Massachusetts. According to the *Halifax Herald* he suffered
from heat exhaustion. Miles's biographer, Floyd Williston, suggested that Johnny gorged himself on rich pastries at a reception earlier on the day of the race. Neither considered the public appearances associated with Johnny's "social contract" as a factor contributing to his exhaustion.36

Just days after his collapse in Melrose, newspaper reports surfaced that Miles had been presented with offers of financial support from track and field clubs in Boston and Hamilton, Ontario. Approached by the media, Johnny's father expressed concern about the possibility of leaving Sydney Mines but made it clear that the family would stay in Cape Breton only if he and his son were provided with steady jobs. "There is absolutely no beating about the bush on this score," he told the Halifax Herald. "We either get jobs which will not have us tied down hard and fast in order to make a comfortable living or we change our place of residence. Hundreds who found themselves in exactly the same position as we are now have done just this and why shouldn't we. I have received many promises in order that we might remain in Nova Scotia, but to date they have just been promises."37 Throughout the summer of 1926 negotiations continued between the Miles family and prospective clubs, and on August 13 the Halifax Herald reported that Miles had accepted an offer made by the Boston Athletic Association. This was premature, however. The family eventually declined the Boston offer and returned to Cape Breton.38

Over the winter and into the spring of 1927 Johnny trained for the defense of his Boston Marathon title, supported by a "Johnny Miles Training Fund" set up by the Halifax Herald. The candid "Gee" Ahearne wrote that the family was in need of "tangible" support and that all well-wishers should "say it with cash." Donations for the fund poured in from all over Nova Scotia and from Johnny's supporters in Boston. The publisher of the Herald, William Dennis, believed that support for Miles was warranted because he was both an "asset and advertiser" to a province interested in attracting tourists.39 An investment in Johnny was thus an investment in one's self and one's country.

The material circumstances that faced the Miles family were nonetheless difficult to endure. Even when combined, John W.'s mining pay and Johnny's clerk pay was not enough to meet the costs of competing on a regular basis. Nor was it easy to raise money from Cape Breton's miners who faced wage cuts in their struggles with BESCO and who themselves relied upon relief from across the country to battle chronic poverty. Still, donations for the Johnny Miles fund came from all over Nova Scotia, including Cape Breton, and from as far away as Boston. Over $1500 was eventually collected for the Miles family before their departure to Boston to train for the 1927 event.40

The 1927 marathon was run in what was unusually hot weather for Boston in April. Johnny quickly succumbed, as steaming tar from the hot pavement seeped through the thin base of his shoes. Apparently Johnny's father had shaved the soles of his son's sneakers with a straight razor hoping that it would translate into a faster time. Before he called it quits at the seventh mile Johnny's feet were burned, blistered and bloodied. He was not alone. More than one hundred runners dropped out because of the heat, including thirty-five before the second mile.41 His supporters were quick to criticize, however. Bill Cunningham, a Boston Post sportswriter and friend to Miles suggested that "Miles should have finished the race if he had to crawl across the line on his hands and knees after the hour of midnight with his bleeding feet wrapped in newspaper."42 There was initial un-
derlying resentment in the Maritimes as well. It was as if Johnny had reneged on his obligation to those who supported him. Their disappointment quickly healed upon his return to Cape Breton. Ten thousand fans turned out to see him defeat Jimmy Henigan, United States ten-mile champion, and eight-time winner of the Boston Marathon (including 1927) Clarence DeMar in a five-mile race at the Black Diamond track in Glace Bay. On Dominion Day another ten thousand people turned out in Sydney to witness his third place finish behind Albert Michelson and Jimmy Henigan, and ahead of Clarence DeMar who finished fourth.

The race in Sydney was one of Johnny’s last in the Maritimes. In September he left for Hamilton, Ontario, to attend the Olympic trials. After a disappointing ninth place finish in Hamilton, the Canadian Olympic committee suggested that Miles was in poor physical condition and requested that he remain there to train. John W. also wanted his son to stay in Hamilton where he would work with top-notch trainers in first-class facilities and would be given a job at International Harvester inspecting twine. The Hamilton Olympic Club had been trying to recruit him for over a year. Although Johnny did not make a formal public announcement that he would be leaving the Maritimes and taking up permanent residence in Ontario, the invitation from Hamilton and the pressure applied by the Olympic committee made a decision to leave irresistible. Johnny’s family soon followed him to Ontario. They purchased a house adjacent to Hamilton Stadium where Johnny frequently trained. Nevertheless, Miles finished a disappointing sixteenth at the Amsterdam Olympics in 1928.

Interestingly, after Johnny’s departure for Ontario, Nova Scotians transferred their allegiance to Billy Taylor. Had Miles gone to Boston he would likely have been regarded as a Maritimer in the Boston States, but many thought his forsaking of Nova Scotia for Ontario was tantamount to betrayal. Like Miles, Taylor was also a British immigrant, an ex-miner and ex-grocery clerk from Sydney Mines. After Taylor finished second to Miles and ahead of DeMar in Halifax in 1927, it appeared that he might well become the next Marathon Champion. In 1928 Taylor dominated Maritime races. Johnny was winning his share in Central Canada as well. Hence, the 1929 Boston Marathon became for many Maritimers a dramatic confrontation between Billy Taylor and Johnny Miles. Miles won the race and set a course record; Taylor finished sixth. In June, the two men met again in a ten-mile race at the Black Diamond track in Glace Bay. This time the residents of the colliery districts cheered lustily as Taylor lapped Miles on the seventh mile and went on to win handily.

Back in Cape Breton for the Black Diamond race, Johnny explained: "I never would have left the Maritime Provinces if there had been anything here for me or any prospects at all for my future . . . every place I went to look for something in my line the answer was we have nothing for you just now." By this time, Johnny’s career was winding down. He raced for a few more years and finished fourteenth at the 1932 Olympics before retiring at twenty-six. He went on to receive a master’s degree in business administration and was employed for forty-three years with International Harvester. Ironically, Billy Taylor also left the region to further his career, moving to Montreal in 1930 to join the distinguished Campbell Park Athletic Club. After several victories, however, he died suddenly from complications after suffering sunstroke at a race in Montreal in June 1931.
In addition to the many Maritimers who went down the road to the "Boston States" in the years following Confederation, there were those from ports such as Lunenburg and Yarmouth in Nova Scotia and Gloucester, Massachusetts, who made their livelihood fishing or sailing the waters of Gorges Bank and the Gulf of Maine or were engaged in coastal commerce between Nova Scotia and New England. Not surprisingly, pride in skills at sea or in vessel construction and a sense of competition that accompanied the exploitation of marine resources provided an impetus for sporting competition across the international border. In 1905, a 360-nautical mile sailboat race from Marblehead, Massachusetts, to Halifax was contested for the first time. The Marblehead race was held on a sporadic basis before and after the First World War until the Boston Yacht Club and the Royal Nova Scotia Yacht Squadron agreed in 1939 to organize and sponsor the event. The race continues to be run even today on a biennial basis and in recent years has featured over 100 boats in five divisions.

The connections between the Maritimes and New England were further consolidated after the First World War when the schooner Bluenose, under the direction of Captain Angus Walters, established a reputation for speed on the open sea. Built in Lunenburg in 1921, the Bluenose won every racing competition she entered but one and over the years established a secure place in regional folklore. The Bluenose's reputation was built largely upon her successes in the International Fisherman's Trophy Race, an idea first proposed by one of the region's most influential socialist leaders, Colin McKay, as a way of kick-starting the region's struggling postwar economy. William H. Dennis, the proprietor of the Halifax Herald and notable defender of regional causes whether they involved Maritime Rights or the promotion of Johnny Miles, immediately saw the value of a series of races

Bluenose Sailors

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pitting fishing schooners from Canada against those of the United States in order to settle the claims of fishermen in Lunenburg and Gloucester as to who had the faster fleet. After the American vessel Esperanto won the first two races in the fall of 1920, work began on the construction of the Bluenose in Lunenburg’s Smith and Rhuland shipbuilding yards. She was launched in time for the 1921 fishing season. Once she met the requirement of a full season in the bank fishery, the Bluenose was ready to contest the International Fisherman’s Trophy, winning the trophy for the first time in 1921. The Bluenose never relinquished the trophy until the series was brought to a close by the outbreak of war in 1939.52

Dennis’s promotion of a race involving fishing schooners at the very time that the fishery was being transformed by the introduction of the gas-powered fishing trawlers was but one manifestation of a broader construction of fishermen and life at sea as the embodiment of Maritime folk identity. According to Ian McKay, as Nova Scotia’s postwar culture producers constructed anti-modernist images of a sturdy and virile folk, they offered a culture of consolation to a region suffering from de-industrialization and the lost promises of capitalist modernity.53 It was not just Maritimers who found these romantic images appealing, however. Reporting on the 1922 series involving the Bluenose and the American vessel the Henry Ford, the Toronto Globe described rival captains Angus Walters and Clayton Morrissey as "hard fistled, rollicking sailormen, whose vocation necessitates almost constant defiance of death, [and] display a brand of sportsmanship that might well be emulated by certain others . . . in the sporting eye."54

In the first few years of the competition, disputes arose concerning eligibility requirements for the race between those who celebrated the fishermen’s skills at sea, and members of the yachting fraternity who, in the tradition of the America’s Cup competition, were more interested in improvements in racing technology. Dennis agreed that there had to be practical rules for the governing of competition but that "they should be interpreted and carried out by men who know every phase of the fishing and shipping industry." No yachtsmen, Dennis argued, should "be connected with the competition in any capacity."55 Earlier, Halifax trustees of the international trophy barred the Boston schooner Mayflower from the race because it had not abided by the rules requiring that vessels be working fishing schooners, and this decision was upheld by the United States Racing Committee which barred the Mayflower from the American elimination finals.

Over the next fifteen years the races continued without interruption. Disputes over eligibility were held in check and the Bluenose came to symbolize the close association of Nova Scotia and New England. Since 1937 the ship’s image has been reproduced on the Canadian dime, and in 1963 the Bluenose II was constructed in the same shipyards as her predecessor. Although the replica never races, she continues to evoke romantic memories of an earlier age of sail and of past sporting glories.56 As Cheryl Sullivan has written, "People from all walks of life and from ports all over the world still respond to the romantic past which Bluenose II suggests. Millions of people have boarded her, sailed on her, or simply looked at her; and when the time comes for an extensive and expensive refit, it is to these people who feel an emotional connection to the Bluenose that the government turns."57
Conclusion: Bobby Gimby and the Bangor Mall

In a recent collection of essays William H. New has addressed the ambiguous and shifting character of boundary and borderlands rhetoric. New describes borderlands as metaphorical places where uncertainty and exchange prevail over tidiness and order, where boundaries at once unite and divide those who live along them, and where life regularly involves interrogating where one stands. While borderlands to some extent are imagined entities, understood metaphorically and produced discursively, borderland regions are also constructed in the course of everyday life. In the interwar period Maritimers and New Yorkers developed a shared sporting life on baseball diamonds, in hunting grounds, in schooner races on the open sea, and along long-distance racecourses. In doing so they imagined the possibility of a coherent transboundary sporting culture. That is not to say that residents on either side of the border were acting upon similar motives or that they conceived of their relationship in the same way. For the baseball players from the United States who barnstormed the region, and for those who came north to hunt for deer, bear and moose or to fish for salmon or tuna, the Maritimes seemed an extension of New England’s metropolitan reach, a hinterland paradise where sportsmen could escape the pressures of modernity. For Gloucester fishermen, the International Fisherman’s Cup races grew out of the centuries-long rivalry with the Lunenburg fishing fleet on Gorges bank and reinforced romantic images of the death-defying struggle of bank fishermen against the mighty North Atlantic. For Maritimers, the sporting contact with New England seemed a continuing manifestation of the relatively benign relationship that had existed over the years, one characterized by economic interaction and the movement of peoples back and forth across the border. Sporting competition with New England provided Maritimers the chance to assert their worthiness and competitive abilities as they confronted both postwar de-industrialization and commonplace assumptions within Canada about the region’s backwardness, lethargy and limited worth.

What made borderlands sporting interaction particularly important to Maritimers during the interwar period, however, was the region’s deep-seated sense of alienation and isolation from the rest of Canada. When it came to sport, this separateness was not simply imagined, but real. Except for hockey, which had its origins in the eastern provinces and spread westward across the country in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the sporting relationship between the Maritimes and the rest of Canada was one of sporadic contact and limited interaction. Few Maritimers, for example, were involved in the national sporting organizations that Bruce Kidd argues were fundamental to Canadian nation building. In addition, Maritime athletes felt discriminated against in Olympic trials and often claimed to be mistreated by Canadian Olympic team coaches and officials. As for baseball, the most popular summer sport across the country, there was virtually no contact between the Maritimes and the rest of Canada. Equally striking is the fact that despite Canadian football’s development in the rest of the country, it was not played in the Maritimes before the Second World War. As Daniel Macdonald has demonstrated, the Maritimes stubbornly maintained an allegiance to English rugby in the interwar period, actively resisting the game’s metamorphosis into Canadian football.

The imagining of the northeast as a sporting region gradually gave way to alternative constructions during and after World War II. As the major debarkation point for troops
heading overseas and staging ground for convoys preparing for the "North Atlantic run," Halifax felt itself reconnected to the rest of Canada. At the same time, the war interrupted sporting contact with New England, bringing an end to the International Fisherman's Cup Races and curtailing the junkets of barnstorming baseball teams from across the border. During the course of the war, moreover, some of Canada's finest athletes joined armed forces baseball and hockey teams in the Maritimes. Included among them were Canadian-born major league baseball players such as Phil Marchildon, Dick Fowler, and Joe Krakauskas, and NHL hockey stars Bill Gadsby, Bob Goldham, Milt Schmidt, Bob Dill, Joe Klukay, and Gaye Stewart. These sporting connections with the rest of Canada increased after the war, especially in the late 1950s as Canada's television networks helped construct a Canada-wide sporting culture. Amid the heightened nationalism of the 1960s (evident in Canada's flag debate and Expo celebrations), the Canadian state took a more active role in the development of national sporting life. Canada Games competitions, the coming of two major league baseball franchises, and coast-to-coast television of hockey and Canadian football prompted a re-imagining of the Maritime sporting universe. By the time of Canada's centennial celebrations in 1967, sporting contact with New England had become as infrequent as it had been between the Maritimes and the rest of Canada three decades earlier. Now Maritimers joined Bobby Gimby in singing about their love of Canada at the "hundredth anniversary of Confederation." As they did, their onetime intimate sporting connections with northern New England receded into memory, to be replaced only by the occasional holiday shopping visit to the Bangor Mall.

1 See the recent special forums relating to borderlands, regional identity and the erosion of the nation state in both The American Historical Review 104 (1999) and "The Nation and Beyond: International Perspectives on United States History," Journal of American History 86 (1999).


7 See, for example, Emerson W. Baker and John G. Reid, The New England Knight: Sir William Phips, 1651-1695 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); Stephen Hornsby, Victor A. Konrad,


15Babe Ruth, as told to Bob Considine, *The Babe Ruth Story* (New York: Signet, 1992), 4


19Ashe, *Even the Babe*.


21For a more comprehensive discussion of New England and Maritime baseball interaction and the "barnstorming" tradition see Howell, *Northern Sandlots*, especially chapters 4, 7-9.


24Sydney (Nova Scotia) Record, 13 November 1925.

25The reference to Dempsey comes from the *Sydney (Nova Scotia) Record*, 21 October 1927. For discussion of the earlier trip involving Wolford, see *Halifax Herald*, 1 November 1924.


27McKay, *Quest of the Folk*, 27-37.


30A brief history of the Boston Marathon and a results of each race can be found at the official Boston Marathon website: www.bostonmarathon.org/history.htm.

31*Halifax Herald*, 5 April 1928.

32Ibid., 29 July 1924.

33Ibid., 19 September 1925.

34Ibid., 3 September 1928.
37 *Halifax Herald*, 29 June 1926.
38 Ibid., 13 August 1926.
39 Ibid., 7, 9, 19, 25 March 1927.
40 Ibid., 7 April 1927.
42 Derderian, *Boston Marathon*, 114
44 Ibid., 10, 19, 24 September 1927.
45 Ibid., 15, 18, 19, 20 April 1929.
46 Ibid., 10 June 1929.
47 Derderian, *Boston Marathon*, 133.
48 Williston, *Johnny Miles*, 75-76.
50 The history of the Marblehead Race can be accessed at either of the following internet sites. [http://www.rnsys.com/Marblehead/Marblehead.html](http://www.rnsys.com/Marblehead/Marblehead.html) or [http://www.bostonyc.org/Halifax.htm](http://www.bostonyc.org/Halifax.htm).
52 A brief history of the Bluenose and the International Fishermen’s Trophy can be found at [http://www.bluenose2.ns.ca/english/history.html](http://www.bluenose2.ns.ca/english/history.html).
53 McKay, *Quest of the Folk*, passim.
54 *Toronto Globe*, 24 October 1922.
55 Ibid., 27 October 1922.
61 Bruce Kidd, *The Struggle for Canadian Sport* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996). These organizations include the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), the Women’s Amateur Athletic Federation (WAAF), the Workers’ Sport Association of Canada (WSAC) and the National Hockey League (NHL).
Cape Breton, MacDonald argues that "the modified rugby rules contained in the emerging Canadian code were diligently resisted and Canadian code football’s existence on the Island was thwarted on every occasion until after the second world war."
