Prince Edward Island's Early Natural History Society

By Winifred (Cairns) Wake

In a September morning in 1890, a small boy stood beside his mother outside the window of Mr. Hazard's book store. The child's gaze was fixed upon a worm-like creature some five inches in length. He watched closely as it voraciously munched its way along a branch of apple leaves. The caterpillar wore a green skin, handsomely bejewelled in knobs of red, yellow, and blue. Nearby rested a drab brown cocoon attached to a twig. And beside that an open book was spread to show a huge, strikingly patterned Cercropia Moth.

George knew all about Cercropia Moths, for he had listened while his mother read Mr. Watson's letter from the newspaper. When the dishes had been washed and put away, they had hurried down to Queen Street to see the Natural History Society's display for themselves. George decided then and there that he would return every day until the moth emerged from the cocoon. Seeing a picture in a book was one thing, but seeing the living moth with its feathery antennae and delicately fluttering wings would be quite another.

NATURAL HISTORY

Head of a brant, as sketched by Francis Bain.

In March of 1889 Prince Edward Island's superintendent of education Donald Montgomery, former member of the legislative assembly and ardent school reformer, placed a notice in the Charlottetown newspapers. In response, six gentlemen met in his office and "agreed to form a society for the purpose of awakening an interest in the study of natural objects." The fledgling group adopted the name Natural History Society of Prince Edward Island. From the beginning, those admitted to membership were encouraged to take their science seriously, and each was urged to adopt a particular field within the study of natural history. Members were also expected to promote the society's objects by preparing papers, or by collecting and identifying specimens and giving information on their habits and habitats.

Intellectual Awakenings

In Victorian times it became increasingly fashionable for people of culture to follow intellectual pursuits in their leisure hours. Natural science was a popular choice for several reasons. For one thing, the science was then at a sufficiently primitive stage that it was still possible for amateurs to make significant discoveries. Natural science was also immensely satisfying to the Victorian psyche, for it comfortably amalgamated religious, scientific, and aesthetic sensibilities. Thus, a naturalist could add to human knowledge, while at the same time experiencing the beauty and pattern displayed in nature as a revelation of God's handiwork.

For individual naturalists, investigations usually revolved around the collection and study of artifacts such as birds' eggs, fossils, plants, shells, butterflies, arrowheads or mammal skins. Items were carefully described, and oftentimes illustrated with detailed drawings. Correspondence and, sometimes, the preparation of papers and lectures were also part of the process. Practitioners took their inquiries seriously and wanted to ensure that information was shared and the advancement of knowledge abetted. In time, some dedicated amateurs achieved levels of expertise approaching the professional, and a number made very real contributions to science. Although many early naturalists worked in isolation, it was always advantageous to associate with others of like mind.

Natural history societies were among the earliest organizations in Canada whose aim was to promote intellectual activity. Informal groups flourished briefly in Montreal and Quebec City in the 1820s but it was mid-century before natural history societies with any degree of longevity came into existence.

Members of Canada's 19th-century societies developed collections of specimens, at first usually botanical or geological. They also purchased reference books and organized lectures and discussions. Groups often featured a central core of well educated members who, in the larger centres, were frequently associated with institutions of higher learning. Generally, it was these people who conducted the bulk of the science, prepared papers, and arranged for the publication of transactions. Their interests were cosmopolitan and ranged across a far broader spectrum than the term natural science today encompasses. Some were involved in the search for mineral deposits that might prove economically exploitable; others laboured to develop improved horticultural varieties or sought solutions to outbreaks of insect pests. In recognition of the value of such work to the public good, many governments supported the soci-
eties financially, enabling their proceedings to be published and distributed beyond Canada to an international audience.

Closely associated with the Victorian enthusiasm for natural science was an unprecedented, worldwide proliferation of natural history museums during the late 19th century. The museum movement was particularly pronounced in the United States, and it was largely to American institutions that the smaller museums of the Canadian hinterland regularly turned for expertise. In many cases, early natural history society collections developed into our first museums.

Precursors

The wave of interest in science also washed over the Maritimes, where the late 19th century was marked by an intellectual flowering. In the early 1860s natural history societies were formed in both New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. By 1895 the Bulletin of the Nova Scotia Institute of Science was being sent to 734 institutions, libraries, and universities in Europe and North America. As Prince Edward Island moved beyond its pioneer stage, its citizens also had more free time in which to become interested in the workings of the world around them. The Island’s public education system, especially in the larger centres, had, for many years, been quietly laying the groundwork for an appreciation of “intellectual” activity. At the same time, debating clubs, occasional lectures, mechanics institutes, subscription magazines and societies devoted to literary, historical, educational or natural history pursuits became agreeable diversions for Islanders seeking cerebral stimulation. The Charlottetown Mechanics’ Institute, which flourished for two decades around the middle of the century, even developed a small museum. During the 1860s a natural history collection was kept at Province House and, around 1870, eminent Charlottetown lawyer and politician T. Heath Haviland was promoting the establishment of a provincial museum – though his hopes were not realized.

“Notes of a Naturalist” began appearing in the Daily Examiner in the 1880s. Penned by Francis Bain, a farmer and self-taught naturalist from York Point, these columns featured detailed observations of the habits of birds and other wildlife encountered by the author in his daily rambles. In addition, Bain provided the newspaper with eloquent and often lengthy articles on a wide range of subjects, including weather, wildflowers, geology, and his expeditions to farflung corners of the Island. Unbeknownst to most Islanders, he was also a regular contributor to scientific journals of national and even international stature.

In time, Bain became a recognized authority on the natural history and geology of the province. Encouraged by Donald Montgomery, the chief superintendent of education, he published The Natural History of Prince Edward Island in 1890. This was followed by The Birds of Prince Edward Island a year later. These works undoubtedly helped to popularize such subjects, especially when the former was authorized as a text book for use in Island schools.

W. L. Cotton, early in a career that would make him the “Grand Old Man” of Island journalism. As editor of the Daily Examiner, Cotton was an early and enthusiastic supporter of the concept of a natural history society during the 1880s. When the first society was born in 1889, he quickly became a member.

The considerable amounts of space given by the Daily Examiner to Bain’s natural history writings suggest the paper’s wish to encourage interest in the topic. An editorial dated 11 April 1883 revealed some of the Examiner’s sentiments. Probably penned by W. L. Cotton, it began: “None of the Provinces of Canada, and perhaps none of the States of the American Continent, are so far behind as Prince Edward Island in the higher intellectual culture. This should not be.” The piece went on to say that the Island had flora and fauna and geology worthy of study as well as competent individuals already studying it. It urged the great advantage of forming a Prince Edward Island Natural History Society as a means of furthering these ongoing scientific investigations. It cautioned, however, that such a group should not attempt to do too much, as doing too much had resulted in the collapse of the recently organized Historical Society. Rather, the paper suggested that what was wanted was “a quiet, friendly association interested in such pursuits of Natural Science as our own Province gives ample scope for, and which may hold periodical meetings for the reading of papers, with discussions thereon, occasionally have and [sic] out-of-doors field day and in doors [sic] conversation, and, perhaps, accumulate a small museum of local specimens of interest.” The editorial concluded by reiterating the need for “some sort of regularly recurring intellectual meetings . . . in Charlottetown” and offered to “receive names of intending members.”

Although the Examiner plainly admitted that it had been asked to aid in the formation of a natural history society, the enthusiasm of the paper’s endorsement attested to its commitment to the cause. The actual effect of the editorial call to action had on readers, or on members of the scientific community in Charlottetown, remains unclear. It does appear, however, that a Literary and Scientific Society did operate during the mid-1880s. Several prominent names associated with this group show up later in the annals of the Natural History Society.

*For more, see Colin Hewitt’s “The Mechanics’ Institutes of Prince Edward Island” in Number 21(Spring–Summer 1987).

**For a profile of Bain, see Kathy Martin’s “Francis Bain, Farmer Naturalist,” in Number 6(Spring–Summer 1979).
The Early Years

Following its organizational meeting in Donald Montgomery’s office on 26 March 1889, the young Natural History Society of Prince Edward Island moved quickly to establish its credentials. By late April it had corresponded with Sir William Dawson, principal of Montreal’s McGill University and Canada’s foremost scientist of the day, to arrange for an ongoing exchange of papers. Through Sir William, the society also secured the right to representation on the prestigious Royal Society of Canada, which had been founded in 1882. Soon publications were being received from institutions in Halifax and Ottawa, and a small but growing collection of scientific reference materials began to accumulate.

The early membership of the Natural History Society included the intellectual and social elite of Charlottetown. Hon. David Laird, former federal cabinet minister and current editor of the *Patriot*, became president, while Donald Montgomery assumed the position of secretary-treasurer. Other members were drawn from the legal, medical, educational, business, and religious sectors. Established names such as Edward Bayfield, Dr. Thomas Leeming, Dr. Richard Johnston, Judge Charles Young, William C. Harris the architect, G. H. Haszard, Charles Palmer, Lawrence Watson, John McSwain and John Newson appeared on the early rolls. W. L. Cotton, whose paper, the *Daily Examiner*, had promoted formation of such a society, joined. Francis Bain signed up, as did several others who lived away from the city. Membership fees were initially set at $1.00 annually or $5.00 for life.

The membership was predominantly male. Within a few years, however, eight women, often wives or daughters of male members, joined the society. There is no evidence that Mrs. Heath Haviland (1818-1902), who about 1850 had made the earliest known plant collections on Prince Edward Island, ever participated in the society’s functions.*

In addition to carrying on independent original research, members felt it their duty to share their findings and knowledge with a wider audience than the scientific community. By July the new society felt sufficiently organized to initiate a series of free public lectures on natural history topics. The first, delivered by Francis Bain on the subject of Island botany, was attended by the lieutenant governor and his wife as well as clergy and other prominent citizens. Three more addresses were presented that fall. Additional lectures during the spring seasons of 1890 and 1891 brought the total to 14.

The broad range of interests and expertise of society members was reflected in their lecture topics: everything from ferns and butterflies to Indians and geology. Talks were often illustrated by specimens and drawings, and were usually followed by discussion. In general it seems to have been the better educated who attended, although others were welcome.

During the first two lecture seasons, talks were held in rented or donated rooms in J. D. MacLeod’s Hall or the Philharmonic Hall, usually at 4:00 p.m. By 1891 the venue had switched to 8:00 pm at the YMCA Parlours. The change of time may have been intended to attract more students and working-class citizens, who would be unavailable during the day. Both the *Patriot* and the *Daily Examiner* provided extensive coverage, reporting that lecturers were very well received. Although low attendance was a problem in the spring of 1890, one year later speakers often faced standing room only audiences.

While the public enjoyed the free lecture program, society operations continued behind the scenes with executive meetings held in the Board of Education office or the Board of Trade rooms. An immediate priority was the securing of permanent quarters. When overtures to the Premier requesting the use of a room in the Provincial Building proved unsuccessful, attention was turned to the city council, from which it was hoped to obtain space in the market building.

Upon the society’s quest for rooms hinged its hope of establishing a provincial museum and library. It had already collected various scientific books and documents and had begun to accept artifacts. Among these were a walrus skull, bears’ paws, a shark’s head, a salamander, various fossils, and specimens of native leaves and woods. Perhaps most significant was a cabinet of shells representing over seventy species of marine organisms collected by Admiral Henry Bayfield during his 1827-1851 surveys of the St. Lawrence River and Gulf.

In the early days at least, new members had to be elected to gain admission to the Natural History Society. At the first annual meeting in February 1890, membership stood at 52, and the group contemplated expanding its mandate to include civil as well as natural history, although no action was taken on the matter. By the spring and summer of 1890, however, declining membership was such a concern that a letter was sent to the *Patriot* inviting the public to join, explaining the society was not just for the very learned. In spite of this move, by the second annual meeting in January of 1891, paid membership had fallen to 20. Nevertheless, the society adopted a constitution and decided to begin publishing transactions and original papers. The first effort, an eight-page leaflet listing the scientific names of 430 vascular plants and 17 marine algae found on Prince Edward Island, was printed in 1891 under the authorship of J. McSwain and F. Bain.

*As readers discovered, courtesy of Elnor Vass, in our last issue, Number 36*
Throughout the winter and spring of 1891 the big issue on the public mind was the proposal to construct a tunnel under Northumberland Strait to connect Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick. The Natural History Society garnered considerable prominence when it arranged for Francis Bain to deliver a public lecture on the geology of the proposed tunnel. Two weeks later, amid wide media coverage, Bain travelled to Summerside and repeated the talk. An enthusiastic newspaper account of the event indicated, “it is not unlikely that arrangements may be made for a course of lectures by members of the Society in Summerside.”

The first annual society outing, a sailboat excursion to St. Peter’s Island, was held in August of 1890. About a score of persons spent a pleasurable day roaming the island’s shores in search of fossils and botanical specimens. The next summer the group sailed to Rocky Point and Holland Cove, both popular picnic spots.

Hiatus

Following the Rocky Point outing and the highly successful lecture series of the preceding spring, the Natural History Society and its dwindling number of members slipped into relative quiescence for seven years. Initially, it was decided not to organize public lectures in the winter of 1892 so as not to compete with a course of botany lectures being offered by Francis Bain under the auspices of Mount Allison University’s extension program. Besides, without Bain’s participation, there were too few capable lecturers within the society’s ranks to sustain a lecture series. Bain subsequently became preoccupied with work for the federal government on the feasibility of the proposed Northumberland Strait tunnel. By 1894 the society’s most accomplished member was dead at the age of 52.

The early Natural History Society also suffered from the loss of other key individuals. In 1890, 42-year-old Donald Montgomery, the group’s founder and most enthusiastic promoter, had died of heart disease. He was replaced as secretary-treasurer by Lawrence Watson, a city druggist, who would prove to be a tireless worker on the society’s behalf. President David Laird departed the province in 1898 to become Indian Commissioner for Canada’s Northwest Territories.

Despite the absence of public meetings, the society continued to exist. The executive met from time to time and kept the mutual interest alive, while individual members pursued their own natural history studies privately. In 1892, the society published a second plant list, compiled by Bain and consisting mainly of algae. A list of 55 cryptogams (flowerless plants), by John McSwain, was published two years later. During the 1890s several books on ornithology and botany were purchased for the reference of members. John McSwain, the principal of Queen Square School, acted as provincial secretary of the Botanical Club of Canada and forwarded records to the national body. He also published a list of fungi and submitted phenological reports to local newspapers. Occasionally, the society came to public attention when its expertise was called upon in various matters.

During the summer of 1898, members of the Natural History Society held a reunion, in the form of an excursion to Governor’s Island. While there, they decided to reorganize formally. Reflecting a frequent marriage of interests during the era, they also added the study of provincial antiquities to the society’s area of interest. By so doing they hoped to attract a larger number of active members.

Natural History and Antiquarian Society

In early January of 1899, following several days of newspaper advertisements, the eight people present at the re-organizational meeting adopted the name Natural History and Antiquarian Society of Prince Edward Island. The reconstituted society was warmly welcomed by city newspapers. The Weekly Examiner commended it to the patronage of “all who desire to see some outward and visible proofs of intellectual life in this community.” The Daily Patriot advised readers: “It is beyond question largely due to the society that so great an interest in natural science now exists in Prince Edward Island and that botany is taught in our schools.”

Three men who had been key members of the original Natural History Society became the officers of the successor group. John Newson, furniture manufacturer, horticulturist and proprietor of the Seaside Hotel in Rustico, was named president. John McSwain assumed the role of vice-president, and Lawrence Watson continued as secretary-treasurer. That spring a new constitution was approved, and membership fees were set at $1.00 for men and 50c for women. Non-members were to be charged 10c to attend public meetings, although the policy of collecting admission fees seems to have been rarely enforced. Instead, by 1902, some meetings were made “open to members only so that they might enjoy certain privileges in return for their financial support of the society.”

The new group once again tried to secure rooms for museum and library purposes, supported in its efforts by local newspaper editors. On 11 January 1899, the Daily Patriot commented: “We are behind our sister provinces in this important matter – a defect which should be remedied as soon as possible.”

The Natural History and Antiquarian Society was not entirely successful in convincing members of the historical community that their needs could be fully accommodated within the society’s enlarged mandate. Only three weeks after welcoming the
re-formed Natural History and Antiquarian Society, the Guardian was calling for the formation of an historical society. In response, Watson shot back with a letter to the editor advising that there already was one. The Guardian spoke out again in October of 1901, this time pointing out the need for a historical society, not just a natural history and antiquarian society.

In early January of 1901 the Natural History and Antiquarian Society was approached by the newly formed Prince Edward Island branch of the Canadian Historical Society. After due deliberation the two groups decided to pursue their own work independently, and jointly where possible. Both agreed to press the government for meeting rooms and museum space. The Natural History and Antiquarian Society subsequently prepared a petition requesting a room in the Provincial Building to be used for a Provincial Museum of Natural History, a repository for historic documents, and a public library. The petition was duly circulated and signed by 131 of the most influential citizens of the day. The petition evidently fell on deaf ears.

Undeterred, society members busied themselves by soliciting contributions to the new museum. In addition to items inherited from its predecessor, the Natural History Society, acquisitions included scientific papers, an insect collection, 100 minerals and rocks from the Geological Survey of Canada, and a herbarium of wildflowers collected by A. E. Gordon, a former teacher at West Kent School.

The Natural History and Antiquarian Society also resumed the practice of holding public lectures during the late fall, winter, and early spring. About ten lectures a year were presented, first at the YMCA and, from 1905 on, at the new market building. Lecture topics reflected the broader interests of the re-formed group. The proportion of natural history and geological papers diminished considerably and antiquarian topics were regularly included.

At Percy Pope’s presentation on “Lost Atlantis” in April 1900, “the room was completely filled and many who could not find comfortable standing room had to go away.” By popular demand the talk was repeated a week later. Lectures on “Electricity,” “Kepler’s Nebular Hypothesis”, and “Solar Radiation” reflected the growing interest in pure science. The most curious inclusion in the series, entitled “The Alleged [sic] Growth to the Extent of Several Inches of a Lemon Plant in the Human Throat,” was delivered by the highly respected club secretary, Lawrence Watson. The presentation featured not only diagrams, but the dried and mounted tree and leaves in question!

Women had a more prominent role in the reconstituted group, with Miss Eleanor Pippy eventually becoming vice-president. Several women made contributions to science through collections of fungi, shells, and vascular plants, and some added new plant species to the provincial list. Women never gave any lectures although, on occasion, their collections were used as the basis of talks given by male members.

Three more annual outings are recorded in the society’s minute book: excursions to Rocky Point in 1889, St. Peter’s Island in 1900, and Point Prim in 1901. These affairs had a strong social component and included family members and friends, who joined the expedition for a holiday picnic. The more serious participants took the opportunity to ramble, collect, and explore.

**New Discoveries and Learned Discourse**

Throughout its two decades of existence, Prince Edward Island’s early natural history group regularly discussed the printing of a quarterly bulletin. But calls on government to provide a grant to assist in the publication of scientific papers, as occurred in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, were not favourably received, and the bulletin never materialized. Consequently, for a few years, the Prince Edward Island Natural History and Antiquarian Society resorted to paying to have reports of its annual transactions included in the Bulletin of the Natural History Society of New Brunswick. The government’s failure to support the Society may have been due, in part, at least, to financial considerations. After all, Prince Edward Island was a small province and its legislature had fewer discretionary dollars than other jurisdictions.

Members of the Island society kept abreast with the latest advances in natural history as best they could through correspondence and publications received from sister societies and research museums elsewhere. In this undertaking the Island group was considerably hindered by the lack of a regularly appearing journal of its own to offer in exchange. The Island society’s printing endeavours continued to be restricted to occasional leaflets. One published in 1899 listed 42 plant species not previously recorded on Prince Edward Island, and a similar list produced a year later contained 27 additional species from seven collectors.

In spite of the society’s limitations, associating as a group proved particularly advantageous to members actively engaged in independent research, principally Watson and McSwain, and to a lesser extent others. Among the benefits were opportunities for scientific collaboration and intellectual discussion with local colleagues. Status as a society also facilitated access to highly qualified experts operating off the Island, a number of whom were eager to receive examples of local material. Fossils collected by members were dispatched to Montreal and Ottawa for identification and interpretation. Specimens of dark-coloured hares were sent away to experts in the hope that Island hares might be designated a separate subspecies of the American Hare (they were not). At a meeting in
November 1901 John Newson exhibited arrow and spear heads and the tooth and claw of a bear dug from an Indian shell heap at Rustico, presumably the same midden excavated in 1894 by the American archaeologist Jesse Walter Fewkes.*

Lawrence Watson forwarded material to American botanists and, on occasion, accompanied them on local field trips. During the summers of 1902 and 1903 he was employed by the National Museum in Ottawa to collect fossils and plants on Prince Edward Island. He also prepared an account of the geology of the province and published articles on natural history in various scientific and popular journals. At one point, when species-splitting was in vogue, an unusual white form of a blue violet that grew on the Island was even named for him, Viola Watsoni.

John McSwain was in contact with the Audubon Society in the United States and, on 25 December 1902, conducted the Island’s first Christmas Bird Count, one of the earliest such counts carried out in Canada. Interestingly, he found no birds, and concluded they had all been driven south by the cold. In 1908, McSwain’s A Catalogue of the Birds of Prince Edward Island appeared in pamphlet form and a year later was incorporated into the Catalogue of Canadian Birds by J. and J. M. Macoun of Ottawa. McSwain continued to forward Island records, many of them Watson’s, to the Botanical Club of Canada, and was a frequent contributor to local papers on natural history topics. In 1907 he adapted a high school botany text for use in Island schools with the inclusion of a section devoted to Prince Edward Island flora.

Even though the most prominent members of the Natural History and Antiquarian Society were involved in natural history investigations, the group did not confine its activities to this field. In 1900 the society purchased one of a number of cannons raised from the harbour of Louisburg where it had sunk aboard a French battleship during the 1758 siege. An engraved plate was ordered, and the following year the cannon was formally installed in Queen Square during an elaborate ceremony.

Francis Bain found and sketched this piece of fossilized plant stem on St. Peter’s Island in 1877.

**Post Mortem**

After public meetings ceased, members of the Natural History and Antiquarian Society may have continued to operate in private for some years, much as they had during the 1890s. As to the precise time and reasons for the final demise of the society, we can only speculate. Probably towards the end, membership and momentum decreased. Certainly, the group never managed to attract mem-

*For more about Island hares — black and white — see Rosemary Curley’s “The Ubiquitous Hare,” in Number 25 (Fall-Winter 1989). Michael O’Grady chronicles Fewkes’ famous find at Rustico Island in Number 33 (Spring-Summer 1993).
bers from outside the relatively small pool of local intellectuals. A greater number of ordinary citizens indicated their support by attending free public lectures but, for the most part, they were content to leave the scientific work, organization of lectures, and payment of membership fees to others. The few individuals whose energy was responsible for most of the society’s doings may have grown weary under their workload. Watson, in fact, had been expressing such sentiments as early as 1902. The loss of so important a figure as John McSwain may have proven lethal to a society already in decline.

Perhaps there was disillusionment over the constant failure to enlist government support for the establishment of a provincial museum. Without the focus of a permanent room to house collections and papers, enthusiasm could easily fade. Maybe the group was unable to compete with the Canadian Historical and Literary Society, whose interests and membership lists overlapped. Practical and popular talks were also being offered about this time by other groups such as the YMCA, the Sons of England and the Fish and Game Association. The province and city may have simply been too small to sustain widespread popular backing for so many intellectual organizations.

The decline in the fortunes of Prince Edward Island’s early natural history societies should not be viewed in isolation. Capitalizing on the same wave of interest in things local and provincial that had launched the society, the Prince Edward Island Magazine had commenced publication in 1899. It featured poetry, short stories and reviews, as well as articles on history and natural history. Natural History and Antiquarian Society members were frequent contributors to the magazine, the most prolific being Lawrence Watson and John McSwain. The enthusiasm and energy which propelled both institutions into existence seem also to have waned in parallel, for the magazine ceased publication in 1905 and the society disappeared three years later.

Worldwide, zeal for museum building and for the study of natural science had peaked in the late 1800s. Both the Nova Scotia Institute of Science in Halifax, and the Natural History Society of New Brunswick in Saint John crested before the turn of the century. Compared to Charlottetown, the societies in these larger urban centres had a far larger population of intellectuals from which to draw. They were also much older than their Prince Edward Island counterpart and both had been successful in having local museums established and in obtaining government support for the publication of proceedings. Yet both societies also went into decline prior to the First World War. The Victorian era was at an end and the mood of the times had swung in new directions. Not until 1969 would another enduring natural history society appear on Prince Edward Island.

**Sources**

The idea for this article originated in a legacy of notes and papers on Francis Bain acquired from Kathy Martin. My major source of information has been the Natural History Society Minute Book, 1889 to 1903 and the newspaper clippings it contains (Public Archives and Records Office, Charlottetown). I also searched numerous issues of the Patriot, Examiner and Charlottetown Guardian of the period. A variety of other documents located in the Public Archives were also examined. I would like to acknowledge David Wake and Joe Malone for their archival assistance.

Lawrence Watson’s biographical tribute to Francis Bain, contained in Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada (Second Series 1903-1904 Vol. IX, Section IV, pp. 135-142), was consulted as were a number of back issues of The Island Magazine. Information was gleaned from Francis Bain’s natural history writings; Catling, Erskine and MacLaren’s The Plants of Prince Edward Island (1985); and the Prince Edward Island Magazine (1899-1905). Bird-Lore (1903, Vol 5, p. 14) contains an account of Charlottetown’s earliest Christmas Bird Count. Biographical information came from a variety of sources, including the Canadian Encyclopedia (1988); Meacham’s Atlas of Prince Edward Island (1880); the Dictionary of Canadian Biography; and numerous records relating to genealogy found in the Public Archives.

Minute books, letters, transactions, bulletins, papers and other materials preserved in the Nova Scotia Museum and the New Brunswick Museum provided details of the activities of early natural history societies in those provinces as well as in Prince Edward Island. Thanks to Alex Wilson and Stephen Clayden for their assistance during my visits to their respective institutions. Susan Sheets-Pyenson’s Cathedrals of Science (1988); Carl Berger’s Science, God and Nature in Victorian Canada (1983); and other works presented overviews of the place of natural history and natural history museums in Victorian society.

The fate of the Natural History Society’s early museum and library collections and of its second minute book remains unknown. Perhaps more of the society’s story awaits discovery, tucked away in the attics and memories of the grandchildren of these turn-of-the century Island scientists.