

Meaghan Beaton

Graduated: 2001

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CV: BA History, Carleton, 1998 / **MA, Atlantic Canada Studies, Saint Mary's, 2001** / LLB Law, Dalhousie, 2002 / PhD Canadian Studies, Trent, 2013

Like a lot of universities in American border states, Western Washington University (WWU) offers courses on Canada and Canadian history. In fact, WWU, only about 80 kilometres from downtown Vancouver, has an entire department dedicated to it: the Center for Canadian-American Studies.

But given the university's location up in the far reaches of the Pacific Northwest, there hasn't traditionally been much representation of the history of Atlantic Canada on the curriculum. Until recently.

"Certainly here people are much more familiar with British Columbia, and western Canada, than with Atlantic Canada," says Cape Breton native and ACS grad Meaghan Beaton, today a Visiting Professor of History at WWU. "But a lot of my focus on the classroom comes from Atlantic Canada—I'm dedicated to that story."

It was her dedication to that story that brought her to Saint Mary's in 1998, after she completed her undergraduate degree in History at Carleton University.

Beaton knew she wasn't done with higher education, and she kept thinking back to a recommendation from her undergraduate supervisor at Carleton, Del Muise, who had suggested SMU's Atlantic Canada Studies program for its small classes, great profs, and wide-open interdisciplinary focus.

"I was over the moon when I got in," Beaton recalls. "The faculty was really fantastic, and I found they were really able to sort of pull out that glint in your eye, help you find what really fascinates you, and help you produce exceptional work. Much of this had to do with my thesis supervisor, Colin Howell, and John Reid who served on my thesis committee."

Beaton chose to spend her time at SMU investigating the history of the Canso Causeway, focusing on postwar reconstruction policy, and Nova Scotia's social, cultural, political, and economic history in the 1940s and 1950s.

During her doctoral work in Canadian Studies at Trent University, she examined Atlantic Canada's experience of Canada's 1967 centennial: "Most of the existing research and other information on this really looks at national programs." Atlantic Canada's place within Canada was shifting dramatically in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, and Beaton ended up looking at "cultural capital projects [institutions, museums, festivals, etc] across Nova Scotia. How they were organized, how they were initiated, and I looked at how citizens and organizations competed with one another to bring money into communities to make them happen."

In so doing, she produced a new body of research highlighting how Atlantic Canada experienced a landmark moment in Canadian history, which has rarely been looked at through a regional or local lens.

Her dedication to the Atlantic story is carrying through to her work at WWU, where it's front and present in her classes.

"As I speak to you I'm sitting here at my computer writing something for class about the founding of

Halifax, and the Acadian expulsion, and how this history has to be contextualized and placed within the broader framework of the country's colonial history and Indigenous experiences. A lot of what I'm teaching about is Indigenous groups in the Atlantic region, Indigenous-European relations, and how this history impacts land claims, and so forth."

And that, she adds, is one reason why as a historian, her Atlantic Canada Studies degree is vital.

"It's difficult to talk about the history of North America, of contact and colonization," she says, "without talking about Atlantic Canada."