



Rural Protest on Prince Edward Island: From British Colonization to the Escheat Movement

Rusty Bittermann

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Who has the more legitimate claim to land, settlers who occupy and improve it with their labour, or landlords who claim ownership on the basis of imperial grants? This question of property rights, and their construction, was at the heart of rural protest on Prince Edward Island for a century. Tenants resisted landlord claims by squatting and refusing to pay rent. They fought for their vision of a just rural order through petitions, meetings, rallies, electoral campaigns, and direct action. Landlords responded with their own collective action to protect their interests. In *Rural Protest on Prince Edward Island* Rusty Bittermann examines this conflict and the dynamic of rural protest on the Island from its establishment as a British colony in the 1760s to the early 1840s.

The focus of Bittermann's study is the remarkable mass movement known as the Escheat movement, which emerged in the 1830s in the context of growing popular challenges elsewhere in the Atlantic World. The Escheat movement aimed at resolving the land question in favour of tenants by having the state resume (escheat) the large grants of land that created landlordism on the Island. Although it ultimately gained control of the assembly in the late 1830s, the Escheat movement did not produce the land policies that tenants and their allies advocated. The movement did, however, synthesize years of rural protest and produce a persistent legacy of language and ideas concerning land, justice, and the rights of small producers that helped to make landlordism on the Island unsustainable in the long term. *Rural Protest on Prince Edward Island* is a comprehensive and fascinating examination of an important, but often overlooked, period in the history of Canada's smallest province.

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