



## New Brunswick Human Rights Commission

**Noël Kinsella**

### **Human rights' interesting links to New Brunswick**

Well, I suppose my first introduction to the notion of human rights was as a university student. First, in a political science course during my undergraduate studies, which I did in Dublin Ireland in the late 1950s, we learned about the work of the United Nations. A couple years later, I was doing graduate studies in Rome, Italy, and I had to do a major paper or minor thesis, and Pope John the 23rd had just written and put out a new encyclical called *Pacem in terris*. My professor said, “Why don’t you do an analysis of Pope John 23<sup>rd</sup>’s new encyclical, *Peace on Earth*?” As I began to study that papal letter, I noticed that he was mentioning—indeed, taking inspiration from—a document of the United Nations called the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. So I went to the library, began to study what was this United Nations instrument, and to my pleasant surprise, discovered that the first draft, at the United Nations, of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, was done by a New Brunswicker: Professor John Peters Humphrey, who was born in the Hampton area, studied at Rothesay Collegiate School in Saint John and Mount Allison University. So I really delved into it. Again, to my surprise, I found another or a second New Brunswick connection with the crafting of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. That was when the United Nations was founded in the mid 40s, at the San Francisco Conference. The first functional commission of this new United Nations institution or organization was the Commission on Human Rights. They asked the wife of the former president of the United States, Eleanor Roosevelt, to chair the United Nations first Human Rights Commission. Eleanor Roosevelt used to summer in New Brunswick, on Campobello Island. I was obviously, as a young New Brunswick student, really intrigued with this connection with human rights and the province of New Brunswick. So, that was my—if you like, intellectual or philosophical—introduction to human rights, through that vehicle.