

French Family Names of Newfoundland and Labrador. Gerald Thomas.

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Volume 18, Number 2, Fall 2002

The New Early Modern Newfoundland: Part One

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nflds18_2rv05

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Publisher(s)

Faculty of Arts, Memorial University

ISSN

1198-8614 (print)

1715-1430 (digital)

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Cite this review

Byrne, C. (2002). Review of [*French Family Names of Newfoundland and Labrador.* Gerald Thomas.] *Newfoundland Studies*, 18(2), 322–323.

French Family Names of Newfoundland and Labrador. Gerald Thomas. St. John's, Harry Cuff Publications, 141 p., refs., trade pbk., 1999, ISBN 1896338186.

CYRIL BYRNE

THE PUBLICATION of Ronald Seary's *Family Names of the Island of Newfoundland* was the impetus behind Gerald Thomas's *French Family Names of Newfoundland and Labrador*. In Seary's book, which attempted to cover Newfoundland family names as of 1955, many names of French origin were included. In the nature of such a broad and encompassing work, however, getting all the details correct is almost impossible. Moreover, in the case of the majority of family names of French origin, the circumstances of them being in Newfoundland generated problems which required special sleuthing, in order to ascertain their proper spelling and place of origin in France.

Gerald Thomas pursued his academic studies in the rich field of the French language folk culture located on the Port-au-Port Peninsula. In the course of his research he encountered the fascinating world of the Franco-Terreneuvien which is as diverse in its origins as the Anglo-Celtic culture of most of the rest of the Island. Many communities had dual names — Grande Terre/Mainland, L'anse aux Canards/Black Duck Brook, Pic Denyse/Picadilly, and the list goes on. Equally dual are the family names: the Benoit are sometimes Bennett, the LeBlanc (Le Blanc) are sometimes White, and the Au Coin become by a strange cultural metamorphosis O'Quinn! Moreover, because many of the ancestors of the Franco-Terreneuviens were 'jumpships,' they altered or otherwise disguised their names to avoid being picked up and deported by the authorities, either British or French. In addition, many of the so-called 'French' were Bretons or Basques, speaking those languages quite frequently in preference to French. It is thus easy to imagine what would happen when all of that cultural melange gets pushed through an English sieve! Sometimes it is difficult to detect if a name, where it occurs, is indeed French, seeing that so much of Newfoundland cultural/linguistic baggage comes from centuries of interplay between France and England.

All that having been said, it was somewhat surprising to find that some well-known Newfoundland surnames of French origin do not appear in the book. An example is Gushue, which derives from the Breton family name Gouezou, well recognized in the Ile-et-Valaine area of France. Indeed, this name has some unusual circumstances of arrival in Newfoundland. The family can be traced in Newfoundland c. 1755 in the Conception Bay communities of Bacon Cove and Harbour Main, the progenitor being a Jacques or Jean Gouezou with a bewildering series of renderings of the surname into English, including Goodshoe. However, a quite separate clan of Gushues exists on the West Coast, descendants of François Gouezou (with

variant spellings), who arrived in the Bay of Islands from St. Malo c. 1866. Another name of French/Channel Island origin which is left out is Hawco, although an original form of it, Hacquoil, is listed with direction to look it up under 'Clement.'

However, in reviewing a very useful book like this, one should not carp about what is left out but praise what is there, while pointing out as gently as possible its shortcomings. There are some useful introductory essays about the origin and scope of the work, as well as the obligatory nodding towards the gods of the book's begetting. Many of the well-known French family names originating from Port-au-Port/Stephenville/St. George's/Codroy Valley are given just treatment. What shows up clearly is the quite diverse origins of this West Coast population: France, of course, but via Québec, Acadie, St. Pierre, Jersey. In this connection, it is interesting to look at the entry under Renouf where one finds that, like the Gouzou/Gushue, there are fascinating pathways by which the name arrived.

Because of the stealthiness by which many Frenchmen — and the odd Frenchwoman — came to Newfoundland, and the consequent paucity of records, much of what Gerald Thomas has to say remains speculative. Yet, as a famous Frenchman has said, "Chance favours the prepared mind," and chance did favour the author with some well-reasoned hypotheses of original forms for names which, as I said, have gone through a most peculiar sieve in Newfoundland. As I am sure the author would admit, this work is preliminary, and an update of the research, taking advantage of a lot of recent onomastic publication, would add valuable material to an enjoyable addition to Newfoundland family name lore and history.

Little Jack and Other Newfoundland Folktales. Edited by John Widdowson. St. John's, Folklore & Language Publications, Memorial University, xiii, 245 p., trade pbk., 2002, \$24.95, ISBN 0-88901-363-2.

W.F.H. NICOLAISEN

WHEN THE TWO-VOLUME COLLECTION of 150 *Folktales of Newfoundland*, edited by Herbert Halpert and John Widdowson, was published in 1996, reviewers and other commentators accorded it the highest praise, frequently adjudging it to be the best modern edition of traditional tales published anywhere. While recognizing the fact that the impeccable scholarship which had made both the collection and the publication of the two volumes a model for students of folk-narrative to follow, many of the critics also perceived a need for a parallel publication of many of the stories in what might be termed a "popular edition," unencumbered by the exten-