

## Shannon Ryan. *A History of Newfoundland in the North Atlantic to 1818.*

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There are, however, also some weaknesses in the editing. Boldfacing words that appear in the glossary is a distracting practice not to be encouraged. Further, some of these words are not only local, as claimed, but are widely used elsewhere, certainly throughout Newfoundland (“turr,” “crackie,” and “tinker” among them) and beyond (e.g., “pemmican”). Another flaw is the sparse and therefore confusing discussion in the introduction about identity in Labrador. In Montague’s words, “My people have been in Labrador since the late 1700s. Most of my people came from England or Scotland ... married Aboriginal women, usually Inuit...” (36). Robin McGrath, in the introduction, uses the outmoded word “Settler” to describe Montague’s family. On the back cover Montague is called an Inuit elder and, within, he says he is a Nunatsiavut beneficiary. Thus, contextualization of changing terminology and identity in Labrador is needed. This would include consideration of issues such as the Moravianization of the northernmost Inuit; the origins of the people known variously as *kablunangajuit*, half-breeds, métis/Métis, Settlers, and eventually Nunatsiavut and southern Inuit; internal colonization; racism; and generational change from Montague’s time. It would also include the role of industrialization in Indigenous regions like Labrador and Canada’s Aboriginal policy, which narrowly defines complex Indigenous identities. To do the subject justice, this book needs more than passing references to “Settlers” or a mention of Inuit elders on the back cover.

Maura Hanrahan

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Shannon Ryan. *A History of Newfoundland in the North Atlantic to 1818*. St. John’s: Flanker Press, 2012. ISBN 978-1771170166

After a distinguished teaching and writing career at Memorial University, Shannon Ryan has produced a sweeping and efficiently written study of Newfoundland in its proper Atlantic context. There is little new research here, nor new ground covered, but a potpourri of facts and a narrative of English commercial and social development expertly portray Newfoundland as a British and Atlantic place. Here we read the facts of settlement and life in early

Newfoundland in a way that does not divorce them from political developments in the London metropole. Whereas other works have broken the two into separate narrative streams, Ryan admirably weaves them together. His treatment is long overdue. Much of the charm of this monograph is the inclusion of numerous primary documents within the text, such as lists of rules and provisions, as well as extended quotations from early writers on Newfoundland. Some of this material is taken from D.W. Prowse, which is only proper as Ryan is in many respects an heir to the great Victorian. Theirs is the history of both the colonial administrator and the indentured servant, told through the illumination of scrupulously sifted sources.

The book is organized into “eras,” which are themselves formed by imperial Atlantic events. Chapter 1 is a refreshing new look at early commercial movements towards Newfoundland from Northern Europe. The chapter outlines an early settlement impulse clearly linked with commodity extraction. In the absence of agricultural lands (other than the occasional rare patch of actual earth), Newfoundland’s great value was in the whales, seals, and cod that swarmed its shores and offshore banks. Ryan outlines how formal colonies differed from informal settlement, and the result is an image of the true complexity of life in this strange part of the northern ocean. Furs and oil were part of the early attraction. Cod came to dominate the commercial fixations of English merchants because it answered European dietary needs. “Chaos” is a perhaps dramatically titled second chapter that nicely outlines the major events of the late seventeenth century and how Newfoundland experienced several decades of uncertainty. Still, even during that time of flux, Ryan makes it clear that this was *the* key period of settlement in Newfoundland. The English fishery was characterized by a resilience that grew stronger during these years so that when the Atlantic quietened down after 1713, the firm foundations of Newfoundland society had been planted. Chapter Three takes readers to a more “confident” British Newfoundland, where settlement spread beyond the old English shore, the Beothuk were crowded out, and the subaltern, itinerant Irish began to form communities in the context of the British cod-and-seals trade. The 30 years between 1763 and 1793 were defined by both social and economic consolidation. Scale and likely technological efficiencies were responsible for a sustained growth in cod output and other commodities were pushed aside. Cod is king in Chapter Four, but there is also a sense of struggle on the part of administrators to understand this place with its big Irish population and powerful English merchants. The American Revolution disrupted food supplies and shipping traffic, but the island had a social and commercial

gravity by that stage such that life went on with a kind of colonial momentum, despite Newfoundland's lacking the formal legal status of a Massachusetts or a Maine. The book concludes with Chapter Five and Newfoundland's final movement "from fishery to colony." This is ground already well travelled in Ryan's seminal journal article of the same name. The migratory fishery dissipated in the face of settled communities. The French stayed away and the Beothuk disappeared. Various technological innovations in Europe (such as oil lamps and municipal lighting regimes) ensured that there was a ready market for Newfoundland oil. English settlement spread to the whole island as well as up into Labrador.

One criticism of the work might be that, though the French make numerous violent cameo appearances, there is no sense that Newfoundland was in any sense a French place too. The narrative privileges the English experience in a way that will appeal to the trade readership but this may rankle those hoping for a truly Atlanticist outlook. Similarly, the Beothuk are never really introduced in a way that does justice to the magnitude of the fear they instilled in English (and French) workers at Newfoundland, nor in a way that illuminates the complexity of their life system and economy. The loss of the Beothuk, however one chooses to theorize their disappearance, is one of the great tragedies of North American history. In the end, Ryan leaves it to others to highlight this key, and fascinating, part of the Newfoundland story. Finally, only the most hard-hearted of neo-liberal historians will deny that Newfoundland was a place defined by extreme exploitation. Most of the English fishing workers were teenagers, many of them coaxed into the trade by West Country vicars hopeful of a chance to offload the boys from poor houses. They were thus unfree Atlantic labour, the strength of whose arms and backs enriched a relatively small number of West Country merchants. For their part, the Irish were the ultimate Atlantic underclass, drawn into networks of trade that had previously been established to feed butter, salt pork, and woollen goods into first the Caribbean and eventually Newfoundland proto-industrial systems. It could not have felt good to be an Irishman, or Irish woman, in Newfoundland in 1746. They were viewed as serial traitors and drunks whose loyalties were with Rome and Paris.

Shannon Ryan's wonderful little book succeeds in doing something that has not really been done since Prowse. It presents a narrative of Newfoundland in its true imperial context while nourishing readers with a steady drip of primary data to contextualize the English experience in this important but really damp and somewhat dangerous place. We need to understand Newfoundland as part

of wider processes, as a not-so-unique Atlantic fishery and naval base, while also appreciating the myriad ways in which life there was so very special. Ryan's excellent book gets us very close to that understanding.

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Alex Marland and Matthew Kerby, editors. *First among Unequals: The Premier, Politics, and Policy in Newfoundland and Labrador*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014. ISBN (hard cover) 978-0773543447

Since 2005 there has been a resurgence of academic interest in Newfoundland and Labrador politics, reflected in a noticeable increase in the number of journal articles about local politics. This resurgence of interest has followed a period of about 20 years in which political scientists and historians wrote very little about policy and politics in the province unless it was in the context of a wider study of similar issues in Canada as a whole.

Not surprisingly, two academics who have been at the forefront of the resurgence, Alex Marland and Matthew Kerby, are the editors of a new collection of original essays. *First among Unequals* consists of 12 chapters, with an introduction and conclusion by Marland. The chapters cover major policy topics (education, health care, the fishery, the economy, and energy), the provincial political culture (nationalism, political branding, and party politics), and the structure and operation of government (the public service, cabinet management, and the judicialization of policy development). The chapters that comprise the bulk of the book are structured along similar lines. They begin with a discussion of comparative theory, provide some background, proceed to a case study, and then offer a short comment on political decision-making. Marland's introductory essay is on executive authority and public policy development; his concluding chapter is on leadership and public policy. There is an extensive bibliography that alone is worth the price of the book.

The 12 essays that comprise the heart of the book are well-written summaries on their chosen topics. Generally, they cover policy developments in their respective subjects for considerably longer than the period between