

New France: Historiographical Structures and Themes

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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REVIEW ESSAYS/NOTES CRITIQUES

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EVER SINCE THE BATTLE of the Plains of Abraham and the subsequent fall of New France, the French Colonial époque has evoked contradictory memories for Canadians. Historians such as Frégault and Creighton, reflecting upon the significance of 18th-century colonial strategies, long dominated the approaches to the history of New France¹ and it is only recently that Colonial historians have turned away from analysing the significance of 1763 to examine the internal dynamic of the society which founded, expanded and set up the institutional base for New France. New historical methods have been applied to the study of the colonial enterprise and new themes have gone beyond the banal winner/loser scenario. A series of recent studies are exemplary of these new tendencies and of the debates they have engendered.

In terms of methodology, one of the most popular of the newer trends, especially among Québec historians, has been the application of the structuralist approaches of the *Annales* school to colonial history. Following upon the lines of this movement is the recent synthesis by Jacques Mathieu, *La Nouvelle France: les français en Amérique du nord, XVIIe-XVIIIe siècle* (Québec-Paris: Presses de l'Université Laval-Éditions Belin, 1991). Mathieu's book deliberately leaves aside the whole military-strategic debate, instead exploring the physical geography of New France as a prelude to examining the communication links, immigration patterns, formation of population centres, trade, commerce and institutions. Explaining the dynamics of demographic and economic expansion become the principal goals of the book. To achieve these goals, Mathieu undertakes an analysis of extensions in property holdings (seigneuries and communities) and social reproduction as a prelude to exploring the institutions, as well as the military and political initiatives produced by this new society.

The conceptual organization of the Mathieu treatment, designed essentially for a survey course in Québec CEGEPs, provides a much clearer and more incisive analysis of the functioning of the society and the economy of the St Lawrence valley colony than one finds in most traditional treatments. By concentrating on evolution over the long term, he is able to place traditional themes (legal structures and institutions), which have generally been accorded paramount importance, within a broader perspective, and to revise the roles attributed to certain founding fathers of the colony. On the economic front, by not concentrating upon the war machine, he has accentuated the role played by the fur trade as the staple of New France up to the crisis at the end of the 17th century and the subsequent increase in agricultural and fisheries exports. As for the "heroes" of the colony, having previously shown the limits of Jacques Cartier's responsibility in the foundation of

1 See Guy Frégault, *Canadian Society in the French Regime* (Ottawa, 1964) and Donald Creighton, *The Empire of the St Lawrence* (Toronto, 1956).

New France,² Mathieu proceeds to downgrade Champlain (who doesn't even benefit from a marginal note) in favour of his associate De Monts, whose contacts in France, with the merchant community and with the court, facilitated the colonization process. Following Eccles' example,³ he suggests that Frontenac has been overrated, viewing his role in creating western forts more as a move to promote his own interests in the fur trade than as a serious attempt to organize the colony's defences (p. 56). In contrast, Mathieu emphasizes the significance of Intendant Hocquart, pointing specifically to the economic initiatives which he took in the early 18th century to diversify the colonial economy.

Although original in its organization, Mathieu's synthesis has not gone far enough in its innovation. In effect, his use of the structuralist paradigm remains too closely patterned on the French model. *La Nouvelle France* has been attacked by W.J. Eccles for neglecting the military-political-diplomatic aspects of the colonial process.⁴ This criticism goes to the heart of the structuralist presentation of New France and, while clearly exaggerated, it does indicate the difficulty in applying a French model to new world colonization. In France, wars and military actions are generally seen as obstacles (*blocages*) to the economic-demographic evolution in the *longue durée*. Along with famine and epidemics, they are seen as "ruptures" which are a natural feature of Old Regime demographic cycles — bringing the population levels down to the capacity of agricultural production.⁵ In New France, on the other hand, the role of the military establishment was actually more positive — the more than 500 soldiers in the Carignan regiment who were enticed to remain in the colony added to the demographic progression, and the budgets for the military added considerably to the economic and industrial infrastructure (witness the shipbuilding in Québec or the Forges de St Maurice near Trois-Rivières). Mathieu has not really dealt with this problem. He treats military shipbuilding in his economic section, and later, in a chronological section, deals with the military actions undertaken to stabilize and eventually defend the colony, but these actions are detached from the "motor forces" of the colonial process (pp. 108-10, 127-34, 221-30). Mathieu has not really gone to the point of reevaluating military initiatives as one of the positive economic structures of the colony.

A second problem, which again reflects upon the French bases of structural analysis, concerns the physical setting of New France: in fact Mathieu analyses primarily the evolution of Canada, the settlements along the St Lawrence valley. French settlements in Acadia, Newfoundland and Louisiana are not dealt with in

2 Jacques Mathieu, "Un événement fondateur: la découverte du Canada. Le personnage de Jacques Cartier et son évolution", dans *Événement, identité et histoire* sous la direction de Claire Dolan (Québec, 1991), pp. 255-270.

3 W.J. Eccles, *Frontenac, Courtier Governor* (Toronto, 1959).

4 W.J. Eccles, review of *La Nouvelle France*, *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, XLVI, 2 (automne 1992), pp. 333-34. See reply by Jacques Mathieu and counter-reply by Eccles in *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, XLVI, 3 (hiver 1993), pp. 553-56.

5 Jean Meuvret, "Demographic Crisis in France from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century", in D.V. Glass and D.E.C. Eversley, eds., *Population in History* (London, 1965), Chapter 21, pp. 507-22.

their own right and, more importantly, the role of the western regions, the network of interior forts (Fort Duquesne, Fort Rosalie...) is never clearly explained. The concept of the river kingdom — in which forts served as trading posts for trappers, for exchanging furs with the Amerindian nations and only marginally as positions to defend territory — is only implied. Unlike the people who are the subjects of the *Annales*' regional analyses, the French in America never really held the territories in question and, as John Reid has argued for Acadia, the Amerindian nations allied with the French served as indispensable buffers, allowing the French Crown, with a minimum number of settlers and soldiers, to maintain a fragile foothold in most of the areas they claimed outside the St Lawrence valley.⁶

In his preface, Jacques Mathieu described his attempt to produce a structuralist history of New France as a "considerable challenge". The results of his work reflect, at the same time, a refreshing new view of the dynamic of the colonizing process and a certain difficulty in applying the categories and concepts which characterize the *Annales* structures to the new world experience.

A second recent publication on New France, *Habitants and Merchants in Seventeenth Century Montreal* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992) by Louise Dechêne, represents another example of the uses of structuralist analysis. The new book is actually a translation of her classic thesis, initially published in French in 1974. Based on exhaustive research in the notarial archives of Montreal, Professor Dechêne has produced a brilliant structuralist treatment of the two principal occupations of the residents of the 17th-century city — the fur trade and agriculture. As she emphasizes in her introduction to the section on the fur trade, she sets out to "capture the interrelationships between the production, distribution of wealth and social roles" (p. 63). This she does with great skill, showing the links between companies in metropolitan France, Montreal merchants and the *coureurs de bois*, whose role was legalized after 1660 when they became the *voyageurs* who set off toward the west with provisions and goods to trade with the Amerindian nations for the precious pelts, furs and hides which the merchants sent off to France. The period from 1664 to 1675 represented a point of rupture in the organization of the fur trade, as the price of beaver plummeted, forcing a restructuring and consolidation of the merchant community, breaking the monopoly on the fur trade by the *Compagnie des habitants*, which ceased to exist, and bringing closer collaboration between the Montreal merchants and the *voyageurs* they outfitted, and to whom they extended credit. Moreover, despite what appear to be excessive profit margins on furs and European goods handled by Montreal merchants, account books show that merchants also found it necessary to take great risks, extending credit over very long periods (often over 18 months) to outfit and supply the *voyageurs* who went ever farther west into the wilderness to bring out the furs. In fact, with the exception of three families, Couagne, Lemoyne and Leber — all of whom were closely related with French companies — the

6 John Reid, "An International Region of the Northeast: Rise and Decline, 1635-1762", in S.J. Hornsby, et al., eds., *The Northeastern Borderlands: Four Centuries of Interaction* (Fredericton, 1989), pp. 9-25.

operations of Montreal merchants were very marginal. They often undertook expeditions in person to trade with their Amerindian intermediaries, and many of them could barely be distinguished from the *voyageurs* whom they outfitted.

Reflecting on the staples theory that the development of the fur trade should have permitted a certain reallocation of profits and surplus resources to agriculture or to other sectors of the economy, Dechêne argues that the theory loses sight of the numerous crises in the fur trade and the fact that the merchants tended to remain concentrated in their respective sectors, permitting little reallocation of either human or financial resources to agricultural development. She proceeds, therefore, to a separate analysis of the structure of agricultural production in a 17th century context — the seigneurial system, indentured labourers and tenants or *habitants*.

For Dechêne, in effect, agricultural development was little influenced by the fur trade, despite comments to the contrary in contemporary accounts written by religious and civil authorities. On the basis of her notarial analysis, she goes even further, jumping headlong into the ongoing debate over the reasons for the decline in per capita agricultural production in the period between the opening up of the lands and the mid-18th century. She argues that the concept of the decline itself must be reviewed, and that a number of traditional explanations must be discarded, among them the lack of crop rotation, inheritance traditions and the drop in yield rates. Crop rotation was carried out, even if it was not universal, and studies of inheritance patterns do not confirm the belief that land holdings were fragmented from one generation to another. Dechêne argues that production yields did decline in a marginal way, but that they remained much higher than has generally been believed. The reason for the lack of significant expansion in wheat production seems to have been more attached to the limited profit margins for wheat farmers (who were excluded from supplying the French army garrisons), to the official price-fixing practices designed to protect consumers and to the commercial practices which prevented farmers from participating in the export trade up to the 18th century. Due to all these factors, farmers simply did not have a market for absorbing crop surpluses. According to Professor Dechêne, there were good and productive farms and, as she shows in her study, the "*habitants*" were less egalitarian and uniformly miserable than has been believed. She cites numerous signs of prosperity, such as the dramatic progression in the acquisition of horses, the number of heavy plows in notarial contracts and the extensions in fodder crops like hay, straw and oats. The obstacle to more significant progress lay in the autarchy of the Montreal market system more than in traditional explanations of backwardness and lack of agricultural innovation.

Returning to what she sees as the fundamental disjunction between the fur trade and agriculture, Dechêne's conclusion poses the question of the fundamental contradiction between, on the one hand, an economy based upon fur, created and sustained by merchant capital and requiring only a limited population to ensure its needs, and, on the other hand, the impetus to colonize and develop the colony, bringing in peasants, developing farms and stimulating production. As she notes, "the offspring of the first generation of colonists more than sufficed to manage the cargoes and keep the posts supplied" (p. 280). But the official desire to colonize and populate New France and Montreal necessitated the spiral of opening up new

lands and increasing production. The limited market capacity of Montreal resulted in the dislocation of this development and she argues that such dislocation was typical of other, similar, frontier efforts, including that of the American frontier, glowingly presented by Frederick Jackson Turner.

If the major lines of the Dechêne thesis have aged well, the introductory sections on Amerindian-colonist relations and on the demographic features of the colonial society have both been superceded by more recent work. Certainly, Bruce Trigger's *Natives and Newcomers* has extended our knowledge of the French-Amerindian relation in the internal dynamics of the fur trade and goes well beyond the tentative conclusions of *Habitants and Merchants*.⁷ On the demographic front, Dechêne does not hesitate to indicate her dissatisfaction with earlier conclusions and interpretations. On this whole question, the recent research of Hubert Charbonneau and the members of the *Université de Montréal* programme in historical demography contains important nuances concerning the demographic arguments of the 1970s. Notably, Charbonneau and his collaborators point to the value of separating the statistics for the pioneer French community from those for the Canadians born in the colony.⁸

The most significant debate over *Habitants and Merchants* concentrates on Dechêne's watertight dichotomy between the fur trade and agricultural structures and her reevaluation of the economic prospects for farmers. Both of these points provoked a rejoinder from another structuralist historian, Fernand Ouellet.⁹ In his view, Dechêne had overemphasized the independence of each of the structures, implicitly calling into question his thesis that the two interconnected structures had produced only a marginally productive society in which farming suffered from the ever-present need for the habitants to supplement their revenues as *voyageurs*. Ouellet argued that agriculture paid a price for this situation, as innovation was rare and subsistence farming dominated production.¹⁰ More recent studies, by Christian Dessureault and Catherine Desbarats, have tended to reject the thesis on the backwardness of agriculture in New France and to support Dechêne's arguments on agricultural innovation.¹¹ Morris Altman has even noted that Dechêne

7 Bruce G. Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers* (Montreal, 1985).

8 Hubert Charbonneau, André Guillemette, et al., *Naissance d'une population. Les Français établis au Canada au XVII^e siècle*, Travaux et documents de l'Institut national d'études démographiques (Paris-Montréal, 1987).

9 Fernand Ouellet, review of *Habitants et marchands de Montréal au XVII^e siècle*, *Histoire sociale/Social History*, VIII, 16 (November 1975), pp. 372-82.

10 Fernand Ouellet, *Economy, Class and Nation in Quebec. Interpretive Essays*, edited and translated by Jacques Barbier (Toronto, 1991), pp. 55-6.

11 Christian Dessureault, "L'égalitarisme paysan dans l'ancienne société rurale de la vallée du Saint-Laurent: éléments pour une ré-interprétation", *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, XL, 3 (hiver 1987), pp. 373-407 and Catherine Desbarats, "Agriculture within the Seigneurial Régime of Eighteenth-Century Canada: Some Thoughts on the Recent Literature", *Canadian Historical Review*, LXXIII, 1 (1992), pp. 1-29. It should be noted that some of these themes were treated in a colloque, "Vingt ans après *Habitants et Marchands de Montréal*", held at McGill University, 13 and 14 May 1994 and that Louise Dechêne has elaborated further on agriculture in the colony in *Le partage des subsistances au Canada sous le régime français* (Montréal, 1994).

underestimated agricultural production which, according to his calculations, actually increased from the late 17th century to the 1740s.¹² On the other hand, Dechêne probably did overemphasize the division between the fur trade and agriculture. Recent European work on agriculture in a non-market economy tends to show that peasants generally compensate for constriction in one area by innovating and developing new production in other areas.¹³ Even Dechêne's own book provides numerous examples of the criss-crossing of the lines between fur trading and agriculture. Was a good part of the fortune of Couagne, the fur merchant, not invested in real estate bringing annuities of 3 000 *livres* (pp. 111-12)? Were the number of bachelors in Dechêne's notarial contracts not abnormally high, and one of the consequences of the fur trade (p. 239)? Does she not make a point out of Widow Desroches pleading with her son Nicolas to come back from the west to run the family farm (p. 255)?

As in the case of Mathieu's book, there is debate and controversy over adjusting structural explanations to New France experiences, but this is one of the elements which makes these books so exciting. Beautifully translated by Liana Vardi, *Habitants and Merchants* provides an invaluable conceptual framework for dealing with 17th-century Montréal and with many of the discussions concerning the place of New France as a prelude to modern Québec society.

While structuralist analysis has been the response of Québec historians attempting to expand and extend our understanding of the internal dynamic of French Colonial society, English-Canadian historians have turned more to monographs on particular themes, central to the New France experience. One of the recent examples of the genre is Roger Magnuson's *Education in New France* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992). Considering the older Gosselin or Audet studies on education in Québec too narrow, the author proposes "a fresh look" and a "broader treatment" of education, going beyond the bounds of formal schools and studies to treat teaching and learning in the larger sense, as applied to missionary activity among the Amerindian nations or as dealing with young people more attracted to the wilderness as *voyageurs* than to the values of formal instruction.

Magnuson proceeds to treat both the formal and informal bases of education in New France. Essentially using the Jesuit relations, he retraces the different attempts to educate and Christianize the Amerindian nations. But he discusses the radical agenda of the Recollets, who sought to impose upon the Native peoples a carbon copy of European values, as well as the more subtle approach of the Jesuits, who were granted a monopoly position in 1632, and who sought to adapt their lessons and approaches to Amerindian culture. Magnuson describes the different approaches used in the "Christianization" process: the decision to go into the wilderness to

12 Morris Altman, "Economic Growth in Canada, 1695-1739: Estimates and Analysis", *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, XLV, 4 (October 1988), pp. 693-97.

13 James L. Goldsmith, "The Agrarian History of Preindustrial France. Where do we go from here?" *Journal of European Economic History*, 8 (1984), pp. 170-87 and my article, "Innovations and Obstacles to Growth in the Agriculture of Early modern Europe: the Example of Dauphiné", *French Historical Studies*, XV, 2 (1987), pp. 208-40.

bring conversion and education to the Native peoples, the setting up of reserves on the Spanish model to acculturate and integrate the nations willing to settle near the towns, the experiment with a specific Amerindian seminary in Québec between 1635 and 1640 and the subsequent integration of Amerindian children into the existing French schools. He notes that all of these initiatives had very limited effects upon the Amerindian people.

Dealing with the education of the children of the elite and the habitants in the colony, Magnuson notes, as did Louise Dechêne, that intendants and governors regularly deplored the impact of the *coureur de bois* and *voyageur* culture upon the colonists. All of them noted that young people in the colony were more attracted to the backwoods culture than to schoolrooms and formal education. As for the educational structures of the colony, they were patterned on those of France, and Magnuson notes the role of the *maître d'école* in the outlying parishes, as well as that of the Jesuits, the Sulpicians, the Récollets, the Frères Charon, the Congregation of Notre Dame and the Ursulines in setting up schools and colleges. The key to his study is the treatment of learning and literacy, in which the author uses the criterion of signatures in parish registers to contend that literacy in the colony actually regressed between the 1680s and 1750 (Chapter 5). He follows up this argument with a discussion of the formal schools to demonstrate the obstacles which they had to confront. Thus, half of the five or six rural schools founded by the Charon Brothers in the Montreal-Trois-Rivières region had closed due to financial difficulties by 1730, while the Sulpicians and Jesuits were torn between their duties toward the poor in the limited *petites écoles* and their services to the elite in the colleges.

Certainly Magnuson's thesis on the decline of literacy and learning in New France is intriguing, although its principal evidence comes from a simple signature analysis and recent studies have shown the need for a more scientific approach to such demonstrations.¹⁴ From a rapid consultation of 17th and 18th century parish registers, it becomes clear that signatures are often, at the most, a first step toward "literacy". Certainly the four centimeter high, hesitatingly scrawled name of one of the witnesses is a weak indication of his or her ability to read and write. Another weak element in Magnuson's decline thesis is his use of the official rhetoric concerning the reticence of young men in the colony to sacrifice their livelihood in the backwoods for schoolbooks. In her book, Louise Dechêne considered this official discourse to have often been exaggerated and she noted that a *voyageur* needed some notion of writing and arithmetic to keep contracts and accounts; otherwise he would remain a porter the rest of his life.

A second flaw in the study is its very weak first chapter on the "Educational Legacy of France". Containing only two footnotes, the chapter neglects the work of

14 See the debate over Allan Greer's "The Pattern of Literacy in Québec, 1745-1899", *Histoire sociale/Social History*, XI, 22 (November 1978), pp. 295-335. Criticizing the lack of scientific control in the Greer sampling is Harvey Graff, "Interpreting Historical Literacy: The Pattern of Literacy in Québec - a comment", *Histoire sociale/Social History*, XII, 24 (November 1979), pp. 444-55, and responding is Allan Greer, "Misinterpreting Historical Literacy - A Reply", *ibid.*, pp. 456-60.

Roger Chartier, Marie-Madelaine Compère, François Furet, Bernard Groperrin and Louis-Henri Parias to name only a few recent contributions. More serious in this respect is the fact that Magnuson, who does constantly pay lip service to the religious renewal behind the educational mission of the church, never successfully confronts the fact that education was an inseparable part of the Christianization process directed toward the Amerindian nations, as well as toward the colonists of New France and the peasants of France. He gives lip service to the religious motives, only to proceed to an analysis of the strictly educational initiatives. This brings him to see Mgr de St-Vallier as a minister of education (p. 68) or the parish priests as participating in a sort of "certification" process for schoolmasters (p. 80). As a result of this split-personality approach, his analysis lacks the nuances and insights of another key work which he overlooked in his research, *The Dévotes* by Elizabeth Rapley. Rapley, who examined women's teaching congregations in 17th-century France and in New France, masterfully showed how religion and teaching were inextricably intertwined in the work of such orders as the Ursulines.¹⁵ Refreshing as it is, Magnuson's new look at education in New France could have been much improved by more thorough research into the origins of the renewal movement.

A second recent thematic treatment of one of the key military-demographic initiatives in New France is Jack Varney's *The Good Regiment: The Carignan-Salières Regiment in Canada, 1665-1668* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991). The book was written, the author explains, to counter the "golden haze" surrounding the regiment since its treatment by Benjamin Sulte and Gérard Malchelosse in the 1920s. Thus, one expects to be plunged into one of the traditional historiographical disputes between the Groulx-oriented French-Catholic school and his Anglophone critics. Varney's work is much more than this. Using some of the most sophisticated recent military history methodology, he places the Carignan regiment squarely into its 17th-century context. Rarely are there long drawn-out descriptions of campaigns, strategy and equipment; instead Varney has produced an analytical treatment of the regiment from 1665, when it was selected for Canada duty and beefed up to around 1,000 men, to its reintegration into France in 1668, with approximately 350 soldiers. Varney integrates the military decisions with political, social and economic trends which dominated the decisions made by Louis XIV and Colbert after the takeover of the colony by the Crown in 1663 and the creation of the royal government. The arrival of the regiment is placed within this context, and its role in attempting to carry out the ever-present policy of assuring that supply lines remained open to the west, in order to ensure the uninterrupted arrival of furs, pelts and hides supplied to traders by the Amerindian nations, is placed in a broader perspective. As he skilfully explains, the French became entangled in the continuing struggles between rival Amerindian nations, each trying to consolidate its position as supplier. Shortly after the arrival of the regiment, Intendant Talon, Governor Courcelle and Lieutenant-general Tracy

15 Elizabeth Rapley, *The Dévotes: Women and Church in Seventeenth-Century France* (Montreal and Kingston, 1990).

determined that the Mohawks were the most belligerent Amerindian nation and they became the target of the military initiatives of the Carignan regiment.

Unlike Magnuson, Varney cannot be faulted for thin documentary evidence. His accounts of the actions of the regiment in establishing a network of forts along the edges of Mohawk territory in the fall of 1665, extending from Lake Champlain (Fort Sainte-Anne) along the Richelieu (Forts Saint-Louis and Sainte-Thérèse) is based on admirable new sources, like the Marquis de Salière's journal. His chapter on Governor Courcelle's ill-fated winter march into Mohawk territory in January and February 1666 is based on five different contemporary versions, but rather than taking a narrative approach, it dwells on differences in the manuscripts and on key questions, like the lack of snowshoes and the mortality toll. The same treatment is used for the Marquis de Tracy's march against the Mohawk villages in October and November 1666, where four contemporary accounts of the expedition are compared.

Some of the intermediate chapters are less informative, and one can only concur with Varney's belief that the moral standards of the Colonial towns must have borne the brunt of the impact of the arrival of 1,200 new men, especially in a context where only about one-third of the population was female (p. 57). Certainly, research on the billotting of soldiers in French towns demonstrates considerably increased promiscuity and rising illegitimate birth rates.¹⁶ Varney simply does not have the documents to illustrate this aspect of his argument, although he does note some evidence of prostitution and he speculates, citing evidence from Trigger, that, in nearby Amerindian encampments, unmarried women may have received visits from French soldiers (p. 98).

The Appendices in the book, and especially the Nominal Roll (Appendix B), provide considerable documentation on the soldiers who made up the regiment. The roll contains the rank and biographical notes for about a third of the 1,200 men, and Chapter 8 treats the question of the 446 officers and soldiers who left the army to settle in the colony and the 100 or more who remained in the colonial army. Several of the officers who returned to France were subsequently reassigned to head the six companies of the Marine which Colbert stationed in Canada in 1669. Such detailed statistics on the soldiers' and officers' decisions to remain in Canada at the expiration of their three-year term of service, like the recent *Filles du Roi* by Yves Landry, certainly enable us to form a clearer picture of the impact of these demographic initiatives upon New France.¹⁷ But, for Varney, the principal contribution of the regiment was still military, for although it failed to defeat the Mohawks, it did intimidate the English and Amerindian nations who threatened the colony and, at the time of its retreat, it left behind experienced soldiers as settlers who shored up the colonial militia and provided the backbone for the defence of New France.

Much influenced by recent military methodology pioneered by André Corvisier, Jack Varney has placed the Carignan regiment within the political and economic

16 Katheryn Norberg, *Rich and Poor in Grenoble, 1600-1814* (Berkeley, 1985), pp. 92-100.

17 Yves Landry, *Les Filles du Roi au XVII^e siècle: Orphelines en France, pionnières au Canada* (Montréal, 1992).

framework of New France. Using Eccles, Trigger and Trudel, as well as work on French policy like André, Lough and Wolf, he has explained the significance of the policy which directed military action and of the place of New France within that policy.

Varney, like Louise Dechêne, demonstrates the overwhelming influence of the fur trade on French policy toward North America, and John F. Boshier has recently published *Men and Ships in the Canada Trade, 1660-1760: A Biographical Dictionary* (Ottawa: Environment Canada, Parks Service, 1992) which sheds further light on the principal beneficiaries of this trade. As Boshier explains in his preface, the dictionary took form as an appendix to his recent book, *The Canada Merchants, 1713-1763*,¹⁸ but it eventually became too long and it was decided to publish it separately. It is divided into three parts: first a methodological introduction and bibliography on the subject, then the biographical section, alphabetically organized, with information on about 500 large and small merchants involved in trade with Canada, and, finally, an alphabetical listing of over 1,000 ships which engaged in the trade, with their tonnage, captains, owners and information on their cargoes when available.

Boshier notes that one of the biggest problems was to find information not just on the large scale, more active, merchants like the Dugard of Rouen treated by Dale Miquelon,¹⁹ but also on the trade with Canada carried out by families and agents operating out of the numerous small Atlantic ports — Calais, Cherbourg, Honfleur, Granville. To obtain information on the men and women who were involved in this trade he has scoured the *communales* and *départementales* archives of Western France, seeking out merchants' papers, notarial documents, parish registers and admiralty records. The resulting documentation is very impressive. The birth and death dates are generally given for merchants, their marriages are listed along with details on their businesses, their partners, the ships they operated, creditors and information on possible financial difficulties.

Obviously every merchant is not listed, and Boshier's dictionary concentrates on the French merchants who dealt with Canada, the men and women treated in his book. What is striking about these cases is the extent to which they criss-crossed the Atlantic, working in Canada, dying in France, leaving some offspring on one continent and others on the other. To complete the dictionary, J.S. Pritchard granted Boshier access to his lists of Quebec shipping, from which another 35 or 40 ships and captains were added. When checking through the dictionary for the major merchants mentioned in *Habitants and Merchants*, many of the problems typical of 17th-century research crop up. Louis Leber, the son of Jacques, is listed, although his father, who held assets of over 300,000 *livres* in 1693 is absent. Charles de Couagne is there, but the C. Lemoyne who was worth 85,754 *livres* in 1685 is missing, as is his widow who entered into a partnership, in 1695, with Antoine Pacaud. Virtually all of the Montreal merchants with assets of less than 80,000

18 John F. Boshier, *The Canada Merchants, 1713-1763*, (New York, 1987).

19 Dale Miquelon, *Dugard of Rouen: French Trade to Canada and the West Indies, 1729-1770* (Montreal, 1978).

livres are absent from the principal entries. For Louisbourg, which was enormously important for 18th-century shipping, the major merchants — Lartigue, Dacarette, Silvain — are present, although they are often found in the entries under other names (mention of the Carrerot family is to be found under Delort). The index makes such cross-checks possible. Although it does have its limits, the dictionary is clearly an indispensable tool for those working on shipping, merchants, business connections or cargoes between New France and the mother country.

These themes, fur trade, merchants, military and Amerindian relations, all show up in another recent book, *Letters from New France, The Upper Country, 1686-1783* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), translated and edited by Joseph Peyser, professor of French. A curious mixture of text and articles, some previously published by Peyser, interspersed with primary sources, mainly letters, journals and reports from French administrators, military men and missionaries, *Letters from New France* is actually a collection of documents meant to illustrate the role played by the French at their Fort Saint-Joseph, an interior defensive outpost at the base of Lake Michigan designed to protect fur trade routes. The thesis advanced, on the basis of the documents presented in the book, is that French policy was devious, even perfidious and cruel, in its dealings with the surrounding Amerindian nations -- the Foxes, the Miami and the Chickasaw -- all of which led to the Pontiac uprising in 1763. In addition, the book strays from its principal direction with a long narrative introduction on the beginnings of French colonization in America, and with a postscript on the 1783 Treaty of Paris, ceding the former French territories to the United States. The book tries to do too much and does much of it in a superficial way.

The key to Peyser's thesis is found in Chapter Three, "The Destruction of the Foxes, 1728-1738", in which it is argued that Governor Charles de Beauharnois tricked the Fox nation and, after promising, in early September, to give them the winter to ask for pardon and to submit to French authority, proceeded to attack, and virtually eliminate them in October of 1731. Peyser accentuates the destruction wrought upon the Foxes in 1731, and in subsequent attacks in 1733, making a point of the deceitfulness of French authorities in their treatment of the Amerindian nations, and he continues this theme in the chapter on the poisoning of the brandy sold to the Miamis.

Absent from Peyser's study are the scrupulous analyses of several contemporary accounts of the incidents he treats, which are such an asset to Jack Varney's book. The curious mixture of text and documents, organized in a sequential order, always leads Peyser to portray one version of each event. As to his treatment of the Fox assault, he is certainly accurate in seeing duplicity in the French camp, but he passes very lightly over the fact that the Foxes were allies of the British, and that they occupied a strategic position along the fur trade route where they posed a regular menace to the French *voyageurs*. It is ironic and somewhat contradictory that Peyser should be "surprised" at the French reaction, for, in Chapter Two, he shows, following Eccles' thesis, that Frontenac was far more interested in consolidating his position and that of his cronies in the fur trade than in fortifying and defending French territory. In other words, the Peyser book, which could have advanced scholarship on the workings of one of the French outposts, Fort Saint-

Joseph, imposes a rather personal rereading of the global picture of French policy toward the region they tried to control and toward the surrounding Amerindian nations.

The recent debates over the structures and the themes dominating the century and a half of French colonization in North America have come a long way from the descriptive and heroic historiography which characterized earlier treatments. The place of the fur trade and of agriculture in the colony still remains central to the debate, but relations with the Amerindian nations, French military and colonization efforts, the attraction of the wilderness and the *voyageur* culture to arriving immigrants as well as to established families and the continuing close ties between merchant families scattered between both continents have increasingly marked the publications of recent historians. The work in this field illustrates the documentary gaps which remain problematic to the further development of certain areas of research, but, at the same time, it shows the very positive results which have been achieved by the application of new approaches and new historical methods to French colonial structures in North America.

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