

Introduction: The New Early Modern Newfoundland, to 1700

Peter E. Pope

Volume 19, numéro 1, spring 2003

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nflds19_1art01

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Faculty of Arts, Memorial University

ISSN

0823-1737 (imprimé)

1715-1430 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce document

Pope, P. E. (2003). Introduction:: The New Early Modern Newfoundland, to 1700. *Newfoundland Studies*, 19(1), 1–4.

Introduction: The New Early Modern Newfoundland, to 1700

PETER E. POPE

THIS IS THE SECOND OF TWO NUMBERS of *Newfoundland Studies* devoted to early modern Newfoundland. The original idea was to present a collection of work by archaeologists, historians, and historical geographers of the kind that has, in the last decade or two, refreshed our approach to a crucial period in Atlantic history. We were not far into the editorial process when it became obvious that we had too much for a single volume and so we went to press with *The New Early Modern Newfoundland: the Eighteenth Century*, as *Newfoundland Studies* 17 (2) (2001), setting aside contributions that dealt with the centuries before 1700 for the present volume. This chronological somersault did not disguise an interpretative agenda; it was dictated simply by editorial happenstance.¹ The eighteenth-century focus of the predecessor collection thus defined the historical end point for this one — but where would we start? The archaeology of the early Native people of Newfoundland and Labrador has already been covered in a special issue of this journal and another is in the works.² We had no intention, however, of excluding either the discipline of archaeology or the topic of Native people from a collection devoted to the history of Newfoundland and Labrador from the time our part of the world first appears in the documentary record.

This ambition posed a conundrum which the editor would have escaped, had he been content to work on the early history of any other part of the New World. How do we relate the colony that the Norse briefly established in the early eleventh century with renewed European interest in Newfoundland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries?³ Or to put it another way, what is “early modern” about Vinland and the L’Anse aux Meadows site, the historical significance of which Birgitta Wallace clarifies in her opening article? Archaeologists, in particular, have challenged facile distinctions between “late medieval” and “early modern”; but there is

2 Pope

no question here of seeking a more nuanced view of transition.⁴ The Norse withdrew to their base in Greenland and, apart from their foraging expeditions to Labrador, Europeans did not revisit our shores for half a millennium. As Wallace emphasizes, the Norse who found their way to North America emerged from a society of chiefs, linked only distantly to European state societies. West Norse society in the Middle Ages resembled earlier European societies far more than it did any early modern state. Such differences between Norse and later European exploitation of the Atlantic littoral mark, perhaps, the very value of the medieval Norse experience, as a point of reference for the history and archaeology of post-medieval contact with the New World. In the end, no, the Norse who built L'Anse aux Meadows were not early modern; but yes, Vinland is a valuable historical perspective on early modern events, the better to comprehend the "new found isle", "la gran baya" and other early modern conceptions of our part of the world. The essay is, in the first place, a comprehensive re-appraisal of the L'Anse aux Meadows site by the archaeologist most familiar with its various phases and *Newfoundland Studies* is a very appropriate venue for her synthesis.

The ethnohistory of the Native people of the Atlantic region has likewise encouraged broader perspectives on regional history, both as a disciplinary innovation and as a pivotal topic. Charles Martijn's re-examination of the Mi'kmaq in Newfoundland is an impassioned response to an emerging trend in ethnohistory, in which reasoning designed to satisfy the courts seems to trump scholarly imagination and reflection. Martijn makes the most comprehensive argument to date for the presence of Mi'kmaq on the Island of Newfoundland before European contact. His late colleague in ethnohistory, Ralph Pastore (to whom Martijn has dedicated his article), predicted that it would become a standard reference.

With Selma Barkham and Michael Barkham, Martijn has also contributed a provocative research note, raising ethnohistorical questions about the whalers depicted off the Labrador coast on Desceliers' *mappemonde* of 1546. This is a notable piece of scholarship, since the senior authors agreed to disagree about their conclusions. The essay is ethnohistorical, in the narrow North American sense, in so far as it puts Native people on the same map as Europeans (whether or not they can be said to have been in the same boat, as it were). It is a successful piece of ethnohistory in a wider sense too, in so far as it explores early modern Basque economic culture.

When we turn to sixteenth-century Newfoundland and Labrador, the Basques are never far away. If they once dominated our coasts, this was in part thanks to the skills of a remarkable family of French Basque pilots, the Hoyarsabals. In his innovative and meticulously-researched contribution to this collection, Michael Barkham presents the archival detail that will bring us closer to Miguel de Hoyarsabal, the author of the first detailed sailing directions for Atlantic Canada.

By the mid-seventeenth century, the east coast of Newfoundland's Avalon Peninsula had become the English Shore — by then an exclusively English fishery but once exploited not only by migratory Basque crews but also by the Bretons,

Normans and Portuguese. While the other European nations simply relocated their migratory ventures to other well-established cod fisheries elsewhere in *Terra Nova*, the Portuguese, for the most part, abandoned their Newfoundland fishery. Darlene Abreu-Ferreira offers us an insight into an immediate result of this early shift in the international economy of the fishery: the dominance of English merchants in the distribution of salt cod in northern Portugal, in the seventeenth century. This is a refreshing essay for students of Newfoundland history, because it looks at the fish trade from the point of view of the market. It also serves as a reminder that the early history of Newfoundland and Labrador is recorded elsewhere and that it will be recovered only by patient work in the archives and record offices of other nations, whose systems of indexing and cataloguing, understandably, rarely give high priority to the people, places or practices of central interest to us.

Not every significant historical document lies buried in a mouldering stack of papers. Sometimes material is easily retrieved, if one has the wit to look for it. The editor, who has been researching seventeenth-century Newfoundland for some time, was very surprised when one of his M.A. students came up with a pamphlet on the seventeenth-century English fishery by the well-known diarist, James Yonge. The pamphlet was not unknown to scholars of Newfoundland, as Keith Mercer explains in his introduction to Yonge's pamphlet *Some Considerations Touching ... By-boats*. It remained, however, not merely obscure but hard to consult and we are delighted to give it the currency it deserves, in this journal.

The editor's own contribution to this collection gave him an opportunity to express a long-standing exasperation with the historical under-estimation of the role of agriculture for the planters of later seventeenth-century Newfoundland by examining economic diversification from the cultural point of view. The fishery dominated every aspect of life, of course. My essay is meant to show that it was not everything and to propose economic culture as an appropriate context in which to raise the question of ethnogenesis.

This issue of *Newfoundland Studies* has been some time in the making. Without a sabbatical from Memorial University, a sabbatical grant, and the hospitality of CELAT (the Centre d'Études interdisciplinaires sur les lettres, les arts et les traditions) at Université Laval, this issue would have been even longer coming. I am thankful to the editorial board of *Newfoundland Studies* for the original invitation to guest edit what turned out to be two issues on early Newfoundland and also for their budgetary support for the many illustrations suggested by our contributors. This issue would not have found the form it has without Iona Bulgin, who acted as our copy editor on an entirely voluntary basis, to the great benefit of the scholars published in this journal, despite her own precarious situation as a contract instructor at Memorial.

In closing I will follow Charles Martijn's lead and dedicate this issue of *Newfoundland Studies* to the late Ralph Pastore. Professor Pastore was, for decades, an inspiring teacher and researcher, a member of Memorial's Department of History

4 Pope

and the Archaeology Unit, and a specialist in the early ethnohistory of northeastern North America, whose work on the Beothuk is of lasting significance. He died too soon, working on his archaeological collections and taking the time to help other scholars, to the end. Most of the contributors to this volume had a chance to work with Ralph, at one time or another, and they will recall affectionately his wit, his generosity, and his humane intelligence.

In Memoriam
Ralph T. Pastore
1941 - 2002

Notes

¹Peter E. Pope, *The New Early Modern Newfoundland: the Eighteenth Century*, "Introduction", *Newfoundland Studies* 17 (2) (2001), 139-142.

²*Newfoundland Studies* 9 (2) (1993), Special Topic Issue: Archaeology in Newfoundland and Labrador, M.A.P. Renouf, ed.

³If John Cabot took advantage of a northern geographical tradition when he made his voyage to our waters in 1497, then a kind of historical connection underlies the interesting geographical parallels between some medieval Norse and some early modern voyages. See Peter E. Pope, "Discovery and Memory: Zuan Caboto and the Norse in Newfoundland", in Anna Agnarsdóttir, ed., *Voyages and Exploration in the North Atlantic from the Middle Ages to the XVIIth Century* (Reykjavík, 2000), 45-60 and "Did the Vikings Reach North America without Discovering It?", in Shannon Lewis-Simpson, ed., *Vinland Revisited: The Norse World at the Turn of the First Millennium* (St. John's, 2003), 341-352.

⁴David Gaimster and Paul Stamper, eds., *The Age of Transition, the Archaeology of English Culture 1400-1600*, Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph 15 (Oxford, 1997).