

## George M. Story (1927 - 1994)

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Volume 24, Number 2, Spring 1995

URI: [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad24\\_2ob01](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad24_2ob01)

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### Publisher(s)

The Department of History of the University of New Brunswick

### ISSN

0044-5851 (print)

1712-7432 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

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### Cite this document

Kirwin, W. J. (1995). George M. Story (1927 - 1994). *Acadiensis*, 24(2), 3–4.

### George M. Story (1927 - 1994)

In May, 1994, with several major research enterprises in hand, G.M. Story, Professor of English at Memorial University of Newfoundland, passed away after a short illness — a great loss to his wide circle of family and friends and to provincial and national scholarship. His principal publication began in 1956, and certain biographical essays are even now in press. His interest in Erasmus was long-standing; in recent years he was closely involved in the programme at the University of Toronto Press to edit and publish the works of Erasmus. Other commitments of national importance were serving on the advisory board of the National Library, advising the Strathy Language Unit investigating national “usage” at Queen’s University, refereeing proposals for the Canada Council, and acting as consultant for two Canadian dictionaries now being edited. From 1984-1994 he also served on the Advisory Board of *Acadiensis*.

A very widely read teacher — a generalist as he often declared — Story was primarily interested in his publications in taking an overview and in shaping accounts of people’s lives in summary biographies. His subjects in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* range from the Beothuk women Demasduit and Shawnadithit (with R.T. Pastore) to the Labrador pioneer George Cartwright and sealing captain Arthur Jackman. Particularly personal and entertaining were his addresses, later published, treating, again, Cartwright in “Old Labrador”, and Newfoundland guidebooks and guides, resources which smoothed the way in the bush for generations of visiting hunters.

Story, among other topics, wrote on the lively tradition of popular songs and ballads in the capital, St. John’s, Gillian Cell’s *Newfoundland Discovered: English Attempts at Colonisation, 1610-1630* (a review in *Acadiensis*, 1983) and Newfoundland place-names from Micmac sources. In a stimulating address entitled “The View from the Sea”, he posed the thesis that the great mass of geographic names in Newfoundland had been established by fishermen, map-makers, hydrographers, looking from shipboard onto the land. He took a similar broad view of one aspect of the folk culture when he and folklore authority Herbert Halpert compiled the survey *Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland* (1971; 1990).

Drawing all of these strands together was Story’s infectious interest in the evolved speech and written remains of his fellow Newfoundlanders and the travellers to this island. If a dictionary is a verbal index of a people and culture, and so he implied in his first address in 1956 (“A Newfoundland Dialect Dictionary; A Survey of the Problems”), then a dictionary had to be written. The *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* (1982; 2d ed., 1990), because of the availability of written records dating from the 16th century and Newfoundland’s connections with both the colonization and the evolving fishing economy of all the east coast of North America, is more than a narrow lexicon of merely Newfoundland expressions. The word-stock which is treated is often the vernacular of much of northeastern North America. Story’s decades-long enterprise expanded as he, his collaborators, and many contributors assembled a massive body of quotations, from both printed and oral sources, and, stimulated by the best examples of lexicography, notably the *Oxford English Dictionary*, he piloted to the point of completion a solidly based historical reference

work for both Newfoundland and the contiguous parts of Canada. Except for its "Introduction" and the "Preface" to the Supplement, the *DNE*, like any reference compilation, reveals little of the genial style and surprising turn of phrase characteristic of so many of Story's other published works, both scholarly and popular. It is a culmination, though, of G.M. Story's interests in his colony and province, in the humane disciplines in England since the Renaissance, and in the phenomenon of language, both fleetingly in the mouths of its speakers and more permanently on the pages of its writers.

William J. Kirwin

(William J. Kirwin joined the Department of English at Memorial University in 1959. Along with J.D.A. Widdowson, he joined G.M. Story in collecting and editing the materials in the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English*.)