

New Perspectives on the British American Colonial Experience

W.E. (Gary) Campbell

Volume 36, Number 1, Autumn 2006

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad36_1re03

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Department of History at the University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0044-5851 (print)

1712-7432 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Campbell, W. (. (2006). New Perspectives on the British American Colonial Experience. *Acadiensis*, 36(1), 130–140.

New Perspectives on the British American Colonial Experience

AS A RESULT, IN PART, OF THE EMERGING Atlantic World paradigm, which focuses on the interconnectedness of European colonial systems, the geo-political and military history of the Atlantic region in the pre-Confederation period has been a site of renewed interest by both popular and academic historians. John Reid, Gerald Bannister, Peter Pope, Rusty Bittermann and Naomi Griffiths, among others, have produced major scholarly works in the last several years that demonstrate both that the core idea of creative interplay between imperial nation, colony and broader political and economic structures survived and evolved in the regional historiography long before it was rediscovered in the United States and elsewhere, and that some of the very best work in this “new” field is being produced by Atlantic Canada scholars.¹ This review will focus on four recent works – two intended for a popular audience and two that are more academic – on the geopolitics and military history of the region in the period from the 1740s to the 1860s: Faye Kert’s *Trimming Yankee Sails: Pirates and Privateers of New Brunswick* (Fredericton, Goose Lane Editions, 2006); John Boileau’s *Half-Hearted Enemies: Nova Scotia, New England and the War of 1812* (Halifax, Formac Publishing Company Ltd., 2005); Julian Gwyn’s *Frigates and Foremasts: The North American Squadron in Nova Scotia Waters, 1745-1815* (Vancouver, UBC Press, 2003); and Stephen J. Hornsby’s *British Atlantic, American Frontier: Spaces of Power in Early Modern British America* (Lebanon, NH, University Press of New England, 2005). Together these works contribute to the broader international scholarly literature on the Atlantic World and serve the enduring interest within the region in our colonial past.

Faye Kert’s *Trimming Yankee Sails: Pirates and Privateers of New Brunswick* is the sixth volume in the New Brunswick Military Heritage series of publications. In *Trimming Yankee Sails*, Kert examines the activities of New Brunswick privateers in the War of 1812 and Confederate pirates or privateers operating in the region during the American Civil War.² The first half of her book describes the effects of the War of 1812 on the merchants and mariners of New Brunswick and, to a lesser extent, those of Nova Scotia and New England. Although the war disrupted normal commerce, it also provided the merchants and mariners with three other ways to earn their living: privateering, licensed trading and smuggling. While privateering had its

1 John Reid, *The “Conquest” of Acadia, 1710: Imperial, Colonial, and Aboriginal Constructions* (Toronto, 2004); Jerry Bannister, *The Rule of the Admirals: Law, Custom, and Naval Government in Newfoundland, 1699-1832* (Toronto, 2003); Peter Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004); Rusty Bittermann, *Rural Protest in Prince Edward Island: From British Colonization to the Escheat Movement* (Toronto, 2006); Naomi Griffiths, *From Migrant to Acadian: A North American Border People, 1604-1755* (Montreal, 2005).

2 The New Brunswick Military Heritage Project is sponsored by the Gregg Centre for the Study of War in Society at the University of New Brunswick. Its purpose is “to inform the general public of the remarkable military heritage the Province has to offer, and to stimulate further research, education and publication in the field”. To date, the project has published, in conjunction with Goose Lane Editions, eight volumes on the military history of New Brunswick. They are intended for an informed public audience. The URL for the New Brunswick Military History Project (NBMHP) website is <http://www.unb.ca/nbmhp> and the quote is taken from the site’s home page.

attractions, it also came with many risks. Because of its legal nature, letters of marque could not be issued until war had been declared and a prize act issued. Once the letter of marque had been received for the named ship, the privateers were subject to strict standards of conduct and the legitimacy of any prizes taken had to be established in a vice-admiralty court. If all went well, the prize was “condemned” or awarded to the privateer and then the ship and cargo could be sold. Because Great Britain did not formally declare war until October 1812, almost six months after the United States did, many of the early prizes of New Brunswick privateers were forfeited to the Crown. Interestingly, the Royal Navy was also allowed to take prizes and, instead of competing with each other, it appears that the Royal Navy and New Brunswick privateers often worked in cooperation. Because the Royal Navy could not provide adequate protection from American privateers, New Brunswick outfitted several provincial privateer chasers such as *Brunswicker*. Business also took place with American merchants, who were allowed to conduct “licensed trade” using licenses issued by the British authorities for the transport of essential foodstuffs to the British colonies, to the Royal Navy and to Wellington’s army in the Iberian Peninsula. This not only gave their ships immunity from interference from British and American authorities, but it also offered the possibility of profitable return cargoes. When all else failed, there was the “time honoured tradition” of smuggling. In addition to simply avoiding customs officers, several means of duping them were devised such as arranging for “false” captures by privateers and adopting neutral flags of convenience. Kert’s informative and entertaining account of this commerce is enhanced by a detailed description of three 1813 voyages of the *Dart*, written from the ship’s log.

The second half of the book moves a half-century forward to the American Civil War. While officially neutral, British North Americans were anxious bystanders, as the Trent Affair, the Confederate raids on northern states from British North America and other events strained relations between Great Britain and the United States. Kert’s account of the period is focused on one such irritant – the taking of the *Chesapeake* by Confederate privateers in December 1863. The capture was the work of John Clibbon Brain, a self-declared member of the Confederate secret service and Vernon Guyon Locke, a former Confederate privateer with a letter of marque for the ship *Retribution*, who had designs on converting the *Chesapeake* into a Confederate privateer to prey on Union shipping. They arrived in Saint John, New Brunswick in 1863 and recruited their crew from local men. Brain and his crew then travelled to New York and boarded the *Chesapeake*, which was operating as a general cargo and passenger ship between New York and Portland, Maine. On 7 December 1863, just off Cape Cod, they captured the ship and killed Odin Schaeffer, one of the ship’s crew, in the process. From there, they met Locke with the letter of marque at Grand Manan, touched at Saint John and steamed towards Halifax in search of coal and provisions before heading for sea. En route, they changed the ship’s name to *Retribution II* in an attempt to make the letter of marque that was issued for the *Retribution* legal for the renamed *Chesapeake*. The hue and cry was raised and several Union warships began to converge on the east coast of Nova Scotia. The USS *Ella & Anne*, herself a captured Confederate blockade runner, caught up with the *Chesapeake/Retribution II* at Sambro Harbour, Nova Scotia on 14 December, recaptured her and escorted her into Halifax harbour. While the actual capture of the *Chesapeake* had only lasted for eight days, the animosities and legal battles over both

the taking of the ship with the help of New Brunswickers and the re-taking of it in neutral British waters lingered for much longer. Ultimately, Kert supports the notion, asserted by other historians of the British-American relations during the Civil War, that the Chesapeake incident and others like it created security concerns for British North Americans and, therefore, contributed to the movement toward Confederation.

Kert's account of pirates and privateers is well written and skilfully condenses a great deal of information into 90 pages. It provides very interesting information and insight into New Brunswick's 19th-century maritime history in an easily readable style. Although it is a popular history, with a format that does not allow for footnotes and only a selected bibliography, this book is firmly based on sound research drawn from primary and secondary sources. The information about the War of 1812 is largely taken from her published PhD dissertation while the sources for the *Chesapeake* narrative are found in the bibliography.³ In keeping with the other books in the New Brunswick Military Heritage Series, it could easily be rewritten as an academic work. As a "primer" in New Brunswick history, it is highly recommended.

John Boileau's *Half-Hearted Enemies: Nova Scotia, New England and the War of 1812* in many ways complements Kert's book. His stated goal is to tell "the stories of Nova Scotia's part" in the war. This he does, although the back cover announcement that the book "offers a new perspective on a key period in Canadian, British and US history" is hyperbolic. The introduction provides an overview of the war and emphasizes the fact that neither Nova Scotia nor the New England states – the "half-hearted" enemies – wanted to be involved in the war and that they did the best they could to maintain normal trade and commerce. The main part of the book is presented as six themed chapters. Chapter I examines the naval war with a focus on ship-to-ship confrontations. In this regard, Boileau provides an effectively gripping and detailed account of the defeat of the USS *Chesapeake* by the HMS *Shannon*, under the command of Captain Broke, off the coast of Boston in May 1813. Chapter II recounts the story of Nova Scotia's privateers and Boileau nicely adds a human dimension by giving a detailed account of the *Liverpool Packet* and one of her owners, Enos Collins. This aspect of the war fell off by 1813 as the British blockage of the American ports became more effective. In Chapter III Boileau turns to the subject of French, Spanish and American prisoners of war who were interned on Melville Island in Halifax harbour. Their conditions of imprisonment, the mechanisms for prisoner exchanges and the removal of prisoners to Dartmoor Prison in the United Kingdom in order to prevent overcrowding are all discussed and Boileau effectively uses extracts from prisoners' journals to enhance his story. This aspect of the history of the War of 1812 is not well known and its inclusion in this book is well done.

The British raids on Washington, DC and Baltimore in August 1814 form the subject of Chapter IV. It is difficult to understand the logic of including an entire chapter on the raids in this book. While the chapter is well written and again provides a very good description of the brief campaign, its links with Nova Scotia are very

3 More detailed information about privateering during the War of 1812-14 can be found in Faye Margaret Kert's *Prize and Prejudice: Privateering and Naval Prize in Atlantic Canada in the War of 1812* (St. John's, NL, 1997). A longer and slightly different account of the *Chesapeake* affair is contained in Greg Marquis's *In Armageddon's Shadow: The Civil War and Canada's Maritime Provinces* (Montreal, 1998).

tenuous. Indeed, the only link with Nova Scotia is that the fleet returned to Halifax with the body of Major General Robert Ross, commander of the land invasion; he was buried in the Old Burying Ground there. Chapter V tells the story of the escaped slaves who came to Halifax with the encouragement and support of the British military. In Halifax they were offered the chance to enrol in the navy or army or to become free settlers. While many of them stayed in Nova Scotia and founded settlements around the outskirts of Halifax, looking after them until these settlers were established was a challenge for the local authorities. Again, this history is well told in a sympathetic manner and it helps to integrate the history of the black communities into the larger picture.

The final chapter deals with the military history of the war within Nova Scotia and the Castine Expedition that captured and occupied what is now Eastern Maine. Again, the descriptions of the military actions are well presented, as is the story of the Castine Fund. This fund was created from the customs duties collected at Castine and was later used to establish Dalhousie University and the Cambridge Military Library, both in Halifax. Unfortunately, this chapter is perhaps the least satisfactory of all of the chapters in the book. Boileau appears to have relied heavily on G.F.G. Stanley's *The War of 1812: Land Operations*.⁴ Because of this, his description of the defensive military preparations and activities in Nova Scotia is very sketchy. This is disappointing as the book is supposed to be about Nova Scotia. Given this focus, the need to include New Brunswick in this chapter is not clear. Boileau also confuses the issues underlying the dispute between Great Britain and the United States about where the border should run between Maine and New Brunswick.⁵ As a result of this the chapter has a shaky start, but Boileau recovers as he gets into the narrative of the actual military operations in Maine. He drew on local Maine sources for much of the detail and also mentions the Hartford Convention of 1814 that, had the war not ended, might have led to the secession of the New England states from the Union. Instead of having a separate conclusion to the book, it is tacked on to end of this chapter. Boileau agrees with the established view that the war served little purpose and that it changed nothing. He concludes with the thought that if Great Britain and the United States had been as half-hearted about it as Nova Scotia and the New England states, the war likely would not have occurred.

Thus, while he has brought life to a series of episodes that affected Nova Scotia during the War of 1812, Boileau does not succeed in bringing "a new perspective" to our understanding of the war. To a large degree, he repackages other secondary sources into a very entertaining and readable format. The chapters on the naval battles,

4 George F.G. Stanley, *The War of 1812: Land Operations* (Toronto, 1983). Chapter 13 of this monograph, "The Castine Expedition", appears to be the main reference source for this chapter.

5 Other sources could have been consulted for additional information pertaining to this chapter: J. Mackay Hitsman, *The Incredible War of 1812: A Military History* (Toronto, 1965); Geraldine Tidd Scott, *Ties of Common Blood: A History of Maine's Northeast Boundary Dispute with Great Britain, 1783-1842* (Bowie, MD, 1992); and Richard T. Young, *Canadian Historic Sites – Occasional Papers in Archaeology and History, No. 23 – Blockhouses in Canada, 1749-1841* (Parks Canada, 1980). Gary Campbell, *The Road to Canada: The Grand Communication Route from Saint John to Quebec* (Fredericton, NB, 2005), which came out at about the same time, provides a good description of the border controversy and surrounding issues.

Melville Island and the black refugees are the most appealing and informative. The chapter on the Chesapeake expedition is equally interesting, even though it strays from the Nova Scotia focus. There is certainly scope for more information about the military activities within Nova Scotia itself during the war, but the information about the Castine expedition is hard to find and so he has performed a good service by providing an account of it. Overall, this book is clearly in the realm of popular history. It reads well and should be enjoyed for what it is.

Julian Gwyn's *Frigates and Foremasts: The North American Squadron in Nova Scotia Waters, 1745-1815* has all the hallmarks of a self-fulfilling prophecy. In an earlier book review for *Acadiensis* he wrote "the early naval history of Canada's east coast . . . is rarely studied". Of particular concern, he noted, was "the naval world in the Canadian context after the Conquest to the end of the War of 1812".⁶ While he was writing these words in 2001 and identifying the gaps in the historiography, it appears that he also had the solution well in hand. This book, in only 152 pages of texts, maps and illustrations, certainly provides the missing overview of the Royal Navy on Canada's east coast and, if it does not fill all of the gaps, it certainly makes an excellent attempt at it. It is also refreshing to see history written from a naval perspective.

Frigates and Foremasts is divided into six chapters with each one covering a significant period or event. Chapter I starts with the formation of the squadron in 1745 to support the New England assault on Louisbourg and ends just before the "official" start of the Seven Years War. The second chapter covers the Seven Years War and the period leading up to the start of the rebellion in the American colonies in 1775. The American Revolution merits its own chapter. The period between 1783 and 1812 is covered in two parallel chapters: Chapter IV deals with the war against France while Chapter V discusses the growing Anglo-American tensions during the period. The final chapter examines the naval aspects of the War of 1812. Gwyn covers a large expanse of history in a very detailed and informative manner. He brings out both the better and lesser-known historical details of this period. While the naval activities during the sieges of Louisbourg or the ship-to-ship combats during the War of 1812 are relatively familiar, Gwyn also discusses the more mundane tasks of the Royal Navy in peace and war. Providing convoy escorts, guarding fishing fleets and preventing illegal trade is not that exciting yet it was an important part of naval history. He keeps admirably close to limiting the discussion to North American squadron in Nova Scotia waters although there must have been many temptations to expand the topic to discuss events elsewhere. One such temptation would have been to give a longer, analytical discussion of the reasons for French Admiral De Grasse's defeat of the British fleet from New York off the Virginia Capes, which led to Lord Cornwallis' surrender at Yorktown on 19 October 1781.

There are several themes running through the book. Foremost is the importance of naval superiority. The North American squadron was often seen as operating in a strategic backwater and was only provided with sufficient strength in times of crisis. Following the return of Louisbourg to France and the establishment of Halifax in

6 Julian Gwyn, "Poseidon's Sphere: Early Naval History in Atlantic Canada", *Acadiensis*, XXXI, 1 (Autumn 2001), p. 152.

1749, the squadron was under-strength and could not prevent French ships from carrying supplies that helped to reinforce her influence with the Acadians and Native peoples and military stores to help build her strength to challenge the British in peninsular Nova Scotia. Following the start of the Seven Years War, local French naval superiority contributed to the decision to cancel the planned assault on Louisbourg in 1757. The next year, the Royal Navy was able to achieve local naval superiority and the attack on Louisbourg was successful. During the first part of the American Revolution, the Royal Navy enjoyed naval superiority and was able to mount coastal raids and attack American shipping with virtual impunity. When France entered the war in 1778 this changed, as the North American conflict was transformed into a global one and the weight of the Royal Navy was required elsewhere. Gwyn makes the point that the Royal Navy was unprepared for the wars with the American colonists and France, but that it was beginning to regain control of the seas in 1782 as the peace talks were getting underway. One wonders what might have happened had the war lasted a bit longer.

The Royal Navy did, Gwyn suggests, have significant success in the Gulf of Maine and Bay of Fundy. As part of the Castine Expedition of 1779, it inflicted a major naval defeat on the Americans. Indeed, one author has written that “the magnitude of the naval loss was not to be duplicated in American history . . . until Pearl Harbor”.⁷ When the War of 1812 began, the Royal Navy had wanted to blockade the American ports, but, as the North American squadron was too weak, it could not. By February 1813, circumstances had changed and the blockade of the Chesapeake Bay area began. Following the defeat of Napoleon, additional ships became available and the blockade was extended up the American coast to Massachusetts. This effectively ended the New England fishery and greatly disrupted American commerce. The lesson here, Gwyn points out, is that naval success required ships, not only for the high profile ship-to-ship actions but also for the routine tasks of blockading, providing convoy escorts and cruising to protect shipping and search for privateers.

American privateers were an ongoing problem for the Royal Navy during the American Revolution and the War of 1812. Despite much success, the Royal Navy could not effectively contain them. As sea-borne guerillas, the privateers could strike at will. Gwyn describes the efforts by the Royal Navy to defeat the privateers by actively hunting for them and by obtaining auxiliary ships such as gunboats for harbour defense and the provincial marine vessels. In addition, there were monetary rewards for the Royal Navy when privateers and American merchant ships were condemned as prizes. They became very proficient at this during the War of 1812 as 61 per cent of the prize vessels condemned by the Halifax Vice Admiralty Court, he estimates, were Royal Navy captures. In his examination of the effect of the American privateers on the Nova Scotia merchant fleet during the American Revolution and the War of 1812, Gwyn, rather surprisingly, concludes that the overall effect was not as negative as is generally thought. During both wars, despite the losses to the merchant fleet, trade actually increased and even flourished.⁸

⁷ George E. Buker, *The Penobscot Expedition: Commodore Saltonstall and the Massachusetts Conspiracy of 1779* (Annapolis, MD, 2002), p. 1.

⁸ Gwyn, *Frigates and Foremasts*, pp. 78-80, 151.

Other areas of emphasis in the monograph are the importance of Halifax as a naval base and the leadership abilities of the various commanders of the North American squadron as a factor in the overall effectiveness of the Royal Navy during war and peace time. With regard to the former, Halifax faced competition from other potential bases such as Turtle Bay on Long Island and Ireland Island at Bermuda, which had milder and more predictable climates. However, this advantage was offset by the forward location of Halifax, which was important for quick repair of storm- or battle-damaged ships, a critical factor in maintaining the strength of the squadron. An important component of this was that the Nova Scotia forest contained an abundant, accessible and relatively secure supply of masts and spars.⁹ In terms of naval leadership, Gwyn lauds Commodore Peter Warren, the first commander of the squadron, as a forward-thinking naval strategist who understood the colonials. Gwyn suggests, likewise, that the squadron was fortunate to have Commodore Sir George Collier in command for part of the American Revolution and Rear Admiral Alexander Cochrane for the closing phase of the War of 1812. Because of his aggressive pursuit of deserters and the practice of impressments in the first decade of the 19th century, which contributed significantly to the War of 1812, Admiral George Berkeley receives a much lower grade from Gwyn.

Gwyn's account of the North American squadron between 1745 and 1815 is very interesting and informative. He has shed light on many previously little-known details of the naval activities during this period. Significantly, he tells the story of the squadron in both war and peace. While this is a groundbreaking book on this subject, it is not meant to be definitive. One can only say so much in 152 pages. His extensive footnotes testify to his excellent and painstaking research. A curious reader will find that there are many areas for further research. During the closing phases of the Seven Years War, New France was experiencing a famine and was dependant on supplies from France. While Britain was trying to maintain a blockade, it was porous and New France was able to struggle on.¹⁰ Because of its importance to the war, it would be interesting to study the structure and effectiveness of the British blockade in more depth. The governments of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick hired auxiliary ships to augment the Royal Navy during the wars with Revolutionary and Napoleonic France and the War of 1812. Gwyn refers to these ships in passing, but it would be interesting to study their activities in more detail. It would also be interesting to examine the command and control structure of the Royal Navy in the western Atlantic. During the American Revolution, there was also a fleet operating out of New York and its relationship to the North American squadron is not clear. Then during the War of 1812, Admiral Sir John Borlase Warren was given command of the five stations of Halifax, Newfoundland, Bermuda, the Leeward Islands and Jamaica. A study of how this combined command worked and its strategy to counter the French and American

9 A more detailed discussion of the logistical problems of the Royal Navy and their effect on naval operations can be found in Robert Greenhalgh Albion, *Forests and Sea Power: The Timber Problem of the Royal Navy, 1652-1862* (Cambridge, MA, 1926).

10 Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York, 2001), pp. 237-9. New France was experiencing a famine due to failed crops and, while some French ships were getting through the British blockade, they only carried essential war materials and some crucial food supplies.

navies would be interesting. These are only three of many areas for further research. Overall, Gwyn has done a great service by drawing attention to this period of naval history. If he has not filled all of the gaps in the historiography, he has certainly charted a course for others to follow.

Stephen J. Hornsby's *British Atlantic, American Frontier: Spaces of Power in Early Modern British America* is not a narrative history as are the other three. Instead, he examines the larger, overarching issue of why Britain's Atlantic empire broke apart in the late-18th century. In explaining why the Thirteen Colonies rebelled while those in the West Indies and present-day Canada did not, Hornsby employs, among other conceptual tools, staples theory and the frontier thesis. He argues that the colonies on the northern and southern flanks of the British Empire in the western Atlantic were primarily producing and exporting staples and, therefore, maintained close ties to the metropole of Great Britain. In contrast, the Thirteen Colonies were more focused on the continent itself and, consequently, their ties to the metropole had weakened or even become non-existent. While this book is described as a geographic history that is concerned with spaces, it also provides a wealth of information on many other aspects of life in the New World.

Hornsby begins his study with an overview of the English expansion into the western Atlantic in the period from the late-15th to early-17th century. By then, the English had settlements in the West Indies and along the eastern Atlantic seaboard. There were also fishing stations in Newfoundland and fur trading posts in Hudson Bay. From this beginning, Hornsby explains how and why these British outposts developed in different ways and became, as the title suggests the "British Atlantic" and "American Frontier". He first discusses the staple-producing areas of the West Indies, Newfoundland and Hudson Bay. At the start, the Newfoundland cod fishing was seasonal, with the ships leaving and returning to the English West Country ports each year. Even when the resident fishery started in the late 1600s, the population still looked to England for capital, supplies and markets. Government by fishing admirals gave way to that of Royal Navy officers in 1729. Both economically and politically, Newfoundland was under direct metropolitan control that was backed up by a military presence. Similarly, sugar was the staple crop in the West Indies with capital, supplies and markets being provided by England; the metropole again provided direct political and economic control. Threats of a slave revolt and attacks by France and Spain ensured a British military and naval presence. The fur trading posts on Hudson Bay were equally tied to England. There was no attempt at settlement, with the traders and servants coming out from Britain and returning there at the end of their contracts. The net effect was that the staple-producing areas on the north and south flanks of the British Atlantic empire were closely tied to Britain – the metropole. These areas comprised the British Atlantic part of the empire.

The situation was reversed in the colonies along the eastern seaboard of North America. Metropolitan control was important during the early stages of the establishment of the staples-based economies. These were the New England fishery, the Chesapeake tobacco region and the South Carolina rice fields. Hornsby describes how this control was lost by the early withdrawal of English capital due to changing economic circumstances such as the failure of the Virginia Company in 1624. The fishermen and Planters began to rely on local merchants to market their products and supply their needs. While economic and social ties to the metropole remained, they

gradually weakened as the colonists became more dependent on local relationships on the North American continent. With the transformation taking place within the staple-producing economies, it is not surprising that a similar change would occur within the agricultural frontiers of New England, the Mid-Colonies and the Back Country of the Southern Colonies. As they moved farther westwards in search of land, the eastern focus of the settlers became the inland and coastal towns and ports. In effect, they “created a new geographic space that lay beyond the reach of effective British metropolitan control”.¹¹ This is the area that Hornsby calls the American Frontier.

Hornsby provides an interesting and detailed overview of such varied subjects as the political, social, economic, agricultural and architectural development of each area. He even devotes a chapter to the differences between towns in the British Atlantic and American Frontier. While they all had government buildings and large churches, the British Atlantic towns in Newfoundland and the West Indies lacked stately homes, as most of the wealthy merchants and Planters of the 18th century built their grand homes in Britain. In contrast, the continental towns tended to have a resident local elite with fine private homes. The American Frontier towns also lacked the British garrisons and large fortifications that marked the British Atlantic towns such as Halifax. Thus, in the first five chapters of his book, Hornsby provides a very convincing argument for why the British Atlantic colonies were firmly tied to the metropole and why the American Frontier colonies were not.

Hornsby uses the last chapter of his book, “The Fracturing of British America”, to bring together his main argument. Certainly, the historical facts support his thesis as the Thirteen Colonies did rebel while Quebec, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, the Hudson Bay area and the West Indies did not. Hornsby provides a fast-moving summary of the events in North America from the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht to the fall of New France in 1760 to the 1783 Treaty of Paris that recognized the creation of the United States of America. Not surprisingly, New France as a staple-producing, metropole-focused colony was fairly seamlessly integrated into the British Atlantic world. However, a series of tax laws, the Royal Proclamation of 1763 that curtailed westward American settlement, the Quebec Act of 1774 and the Royal Navy impressments of seamen widened the gap between the American colonies and Great Britain. Hornsby describes how the British could enforce the Proclamation of 1763 and the Sugar Act of 1764 by using their garrisons in the west and the Royal Navy on the Atlantic. However, enforcement of the Stamp Tax of 1765 and the Townshend Duties of 1767 failed because of the lack of an effective British military presence along the Atlantic seaboard. The growing American colonial resistance to the increasing efforts by the British government to impose its will led to the outbreak of rebellion in 1775.

Ultimately, the last chapter of *British Atlantic, American Frontier* is less satisfying than the previous chapters. Curiously, the discussion of the breaking up of the first empire, on which the argument seems to depend, is considerably shorter than the chapters on the characteristics of the British Atlantic and American Frontier colonies. One almost has the impression that he decided to quickly wind up the book with the

11 Stephen J. Hornsby, *British Atlantic, American Frontier: Spaces of Power in Early Modern British America* (Lebanon, NH, 2005), p. 179.

equivalent of a series of “homeward bounder” stitches. In the buildup to the fracturing of British America, Hornsby mentions how the elites of the American colonies “increasingly saw themselves as equal partners with London in the running of the British American empire” and how the indebtedness of the tobacco planters of the Chesapeake to the British merchants caused them to join the resistance to increased British control.¹² More space could have been given to showing how this led to active rebellion. While Hornsby states that the absence of British military and naval forces allowed dissent to grow unchecked into rebellion, he does not provide the details of the distribution of the British forces in America. Other sources state that, of the 18 British regiments in America in 1775, 12 were stationed in Boston while the rest were being used to garrison the peripheries such as Canada and Florida.¹³ This concentration of force in Boston and its absence in the other Thirteen Colonies helps to explain how the rebellion was able to develop without interference from the British. Even the British forces in Boston were surrounded and outnumbered by the spontaneous mustering of the American colonial militia. The march on Lexington and Concord in April 1775 showed that the British were not in control of the countryside.¹⁴ More broadly, there could have also been more analysis of the breakdown of British authority in the Thirteen Colonies. And while the flight of the Loyalists after the end of the American Revolution is mentioned, their role during the Revolution is not. Given the large number of American colonists who remained loyal to the Crown and who were mainly located in the Mid and Southern Colonies, Hornsby should have addressed how his American Frontier thesis accounted for this anomaly.

As befitting a geographically orientated book, Hornsby makes excellent use of maps to illustrate his points. He uses different projections, such as polar ones, to emphasize the relationship between Britain, Newfoundland and Hudson Bay – a relationship that is lost by distortion in the standard Mercator projection. For most of the book, New France (Acadia and Quebec) is a blank space on the map as the discussion focuses on spaces to the north and south of it. This is appropriate as this was not British territory for most of the period being discussed, but it is still a bit disconcerting. Even after 1713, Nova Scotia is not drawn into the discussion until the narrative history in Chapter Six. Curiously, the fur trade is not included in the discussion of the Mid Colonies. This is surprising as the rivalry between the fur trade along the Hudson and St. Lawrence rivers was one of the main elements of Innis’s *The Fur Trade in Canada*.¹⁵ The above criticisms, though, should not be viewed as reservations about the overall quality and importance of the book. Hornsby has presented a very interesting and challenging re-examination of why the British Atlantic empire fractured in the way that it did. It is thought-provoking and will

12 Hornsby, *British Atlantic, American Frontier*, pp. 226, 231.

13 Edward E. Curtis, *The Organization of the British Army in the American Revolution* (St. Clair Shores, MI, 1972), p. 3; William R. Nester, *The First Global War: Britain, France, and the Fate of North America, 1756-1775* (Westport, CT, 2000), pp. 246-55.

14 Christophe Hibbert, *Redcoats and Rebels: The War for America, 1770-1781* (London, 1991), pp. 29-37.

15 Harold A. Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History*, rev. ed. (Toronto, 1970), p. 166.

hopefully generate renewed interest in this dynamic period of the history of North America.

Taken collectively, these four books provide a wide range of interesting and informative details about the history of the British colonial experience in America. Even when the same topics are discussed, such as privateering, each author brings a different perspective to the subject. The further a book gets away from primary sources, of course, the more suspect the information it contains becomes and such books must be considered accordingly. Kert's *Trimming Yankee Sails: Pirates and Privateers of New Brunswick*, due to its solid basis in research, is several cuts above the average popular history book. Boileau's *Half-Hearted Enemies: Nova Scotia, New England and the War of 1812* has its merits, especially for the stirring narratives it provides. Gwyn's *Frigates and Foremasts: The North American Squadron in Nova Scotia Waters, 1745-1815* is the best narrative history and fills the gaps in the historiography of the Royal Navy in Nova Scotia waters. It will hopefully lead to further research in this largely unknown and under-appreciated subject. Finally, Hornsby's *British Atlantic, American Frontier: Spaces of Power in Early Modern British America* could become a classic. It presents a stimulating look at the nature of the first British Empire in the Western Hemisphere and a challenging interpretation of why it broke apart. It clearly merits further discussion and debate.

W.E. (GARY) CAMPBELL