

***Marius Barbeau: Man of Mana.* By Laurence Nowry. (Toronto: New Canada Publications, 1995. P. 496, chronology, index, bibliography, \$27.95, ISBN 1- 550210100-5, pbk.)**

Anna Kearney Guigné

Volume 20, Number 1-2, 1998

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1087744ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1087744ar>

[See table of contents](#)

---

Publisher(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (print)

1708-0401 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

---

Cite this review

Kearney Guigné, A. (1998). Review of [*Marius Barbeau: Man of Mana.* By Laurence Nowry. (Toronto: New Canada Publications, 1995. P. 496, chronology, index, bibliography, \$27.95, ISBN 1- 550210100-5, pbk.)]. *Ethnologies*, 20(1-2), 226-231. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1087744ar>

can mean?" (p. 241). Montenyohl suggests that Ong's definition of orality is problematic for the folklorist, in that his focus on the preliterate has ushered orality to a premature death. Montenyohl urges the acknowledgement that "language and literature scholars and folklorists have basically been looking at different oralities" and that perspective on orality from a folkloristic standpoint must be reclaimed as communicative and performative.

This deceptively slim anthology belies the weighty impact and presence of folklorists in the discussion of cultural theory. This book offers something for everyone; in the "true" folkloristic tradition, definitions and assumptions are revisited and re-invigorated, and discussions integrate foundations (i.e. Tylor) as well as new directions (i.e. Shuman and Briggs). Overall, the theoretical groundedness of this anthology makes the strange familiar and complicates both. This volume could be effectively used for both the beginning student and the practiced theorist in many disciplines, as it simultaneously offers moments of comfort, shock(s) of recognition, and above all, intellectual rigor. In the discussion of cultural theory, this anthology reflects the fact that the critical folkloristic voice is well-placed, confidently emergent, and perhaps best of all, smart.

ELLEN B. DAMSKY

Memorial University of Newfoundland  
St. John's, Newfoundland

---

**Marius Barbeau: *Man of Mana*.** By Laurence Nowry. (Toronto: New Canada Publications, 1995. P. 496, chronology, index, bibliography, \$27.95, ISBN 1-550210100-5, pbk.)

Nowry's *Man of Mana* is a biographical account of the life of Marius Barbeau (1883-1969), the renowned anthropologist and leading pioneer of the folklore studies movement in Canada. Born in 1883, in Ste-Marie-de-Beauce, Quebec, Barbeau initially had aspirations to become a priest. In 1907 he instead acquired his first degree as a lawyer from Laval. Shortly thereafter, he was awarded a Rhodes scholarship, studying anthropology, archeology and ethnology at Oxford University. Barbeau finished off his education abroad by spending time furthering his studies in anthropology at the Sorbonne.

In 1911, at age 28, Barbeau joined the staff of the Geological Survey of Canada (later to become the National Museum of Canada) as assistant

ethnologist in the newly formed Anthropological Division under the direction of Edward Sapir. Barbeau's first field work focused on Amerindian traditions amongst the Hurons and Wyandot. But following the now legendary meeting with Franz Boas in 1913, Barbeau turned his attention as well to the documentation of French traditions in Canada. In the process he launched the National Museum on a new course of documenting not only native but also European traditions.

Although Barbeau officially retired from the National Museum in 1949, his ties to the government and to the folklore studies movement in Canada continued in one form or another up to the time of his death in 1969. As Carpenter noted in 1979, although Barbeau's contribution to Canadian anthropology and folklore is extensive, his life has never been fully documented (Carpenter 1979: 220). Nowry's work therefore makes a significant contribution in that it represents the first lengthy examination of Barbeau and his extensive career.

The impetus for this present biography grew out of Nowry's work related to several earlier radio and television productions pertaining to Barbeau. In 1965 Nowry conducted 3 1/2 hours of taped interviews in collaboration with Barbeau (referred to in this book as the "Nowry-Barbeau Reminiscences"). This material in turn provided the basis for additional works, including two CBC productions: *Dr. Marius Barbeau, Canada's Pioneer Folklorist* (1965) and *The Heritage of Marius Barbeau* (1983) (p. 8). Nowry also conducted interviews with family members such as Barbeau's daughter Dalila Barbeau Price, and with those who knew Barbeau personally, including Luc Lacourcière, Renée Landry, and Helen Creighton to name a few. Finally, Nowry draws extensively upon Barbeau's massive collection of papers found in the Canadian Museum of Civilization where, as the author notes, there was much material to plough through, over 5600 separate files dating from 1910 (p. 12).

Nowry's examination of Barbeau's life is divided into three sections. Part One is a discussion of Barbeau's early years, his education at Laval and at Oxford, and his first explorations in Europe (chapters 1-7). Part Two (chapters 8-19) is an examination of Barbeau's beginnings as an anthropologist, his initial forays into folklore collecting, his liaisons with various informants and interpreters who worked for him in the field and his activities at the National Museum. Part Three (chapters 20-25) documents Barbeau's later years, up to and following his retirement in 1949, including his final field trips, and his efforts as a popularizer of Canadian heritage (chapters 20-25).

While there is a great deal to interest the reader in this biography, at times it seems top-heavy, overburdened with needless detail. Nowry's discussion of Barbeau's early life, his often-turbulent relationship with his father and growing up in the Beauce, his finances and demands for money, is overly lengthy. At other points one is left hanging, wondering where Nowry is going with certain topics he has introduced.

A case in point is his account of Barbeau's activities for 1951-52. Nowry quotes large chunks of a memo Barbeau wrote to Dr. Alcock, the then Director of the National Museum, expressing his concerns regarding the future of the Anthropological Division (p. 374-5) as a result of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences (Massey Commission). Nowry says little else about the subject until pages later when we learn that in 1956, as a result of the Massey Commission's recommendation, the National Museum was split into two, forming the Museums of Natural History and Human History (p. 384). Nowry doesn't state the obvious. Even after his retirement Barbeau was still a major force functioning within the National Museum. His ties and his stature within the museum were such that he could speak out.

Although Nowry does highlight many of Barbeau's folklore-related activities, there is no attempt to reveal the man's real knack for putting things in place. In discussing the establishment of the Canadian Folk Music Society in 1956, Nowry notes that it was "as much a creature of the National Museum as of Barbeau, its facilities and staff playing a central role; though the connection was inspired by Barbeau" (p. 380). However Nowry doesn't effectively draw together the linkages between Barbeau's role at the National Museum and his nurturing and ongoing liaisons with Museum staff members such as Carmen Roy, Kenneth Peacock and a whole host of others within Barbeau's network who were equally caught up in the growth of the folklore studies movement. Nowry likewise makes passing references to certain discrepancies in Barbeau's career, including some 'untidy scholarship' (p. 256-257), his interests in women (p. 272 and 365), and his sales of articles to supplement his income (p. 255), but none of these observations is well developed. The problem is that he merely refers in passing to a number of matters before simply moving on.

Certain details which would add to our knowledge of this man and his liaisons are often overlooked. For example, there is a passing reference to Barbeau's preparation of a long-play recording *Canadian Folk Songs* (Columbia SL-211, Volume 8, 1954) (p. 330). Nowry doesn't say why this record came

about. In fact, Alan Lomax, the well known American folk-song collector and compiler of folk song materials, was commissioned by Columbia records to compile a special folk series called the *World Library of Folk and Primitive Music*. In 1950 Lomax sent a letter to Barbeau inviting him to assemble the Canadian album. Although Nowry refers to Lomax elsewhere in the book (p. 193), one wonders why he didn't pursue the significance of this 'south-of-the-border' connection, especially as the correspondence exists.<sup>1</sup>

Nowry's appraisal of Barbeau's folklore-related work is noticeably weak. We know that Barbeau was a pivotal force on a number of fronts. He was a popularizer and a promoter of folklore within Canada. As Nowry observes, "Barbeau brought science to folklore and folklore to science — preserving and promoting traditions that had taken root in Canadian soil" (p. 8). I would therefore have liked Nowry to explore in more detail Barbeau's impact on the growth of this discipline in Canada. For example, Barbeau was instrumental in the launching of a number folklore-related careers (Carpenter 1979: 230-233). Even though he officially retired from the National Museum in 1949, museum staff were strongly influenced by Barbeau and his activities long after this date.

This work is a frustrating one to read because it leaps all over the place. In attempting to set down the details of Barbeau's life, Nowry doesn't follow through with his own analysis of what might actually have been going on. Additionally the citation format is often frustrating. The origins of information are given in passing or implied by the order in which the material is provided. Although sources are provided at the end of each chapter, the reader is left having to deduce exactly where a piece of information may be located by the order in which it is discussed. This often doesn't work and the reader can spend much time trying to determine just exactly what source Nowry is using.

As a final note, Nowry observes "that what has been written about Barbeau tends more to error than the meticulous" and that little has been written on Barbeau (p. 13). Sadly he does not appear to be familiar with several good works which might have helped his own efforts. Noticeably absent from his bibliography are for example the writings of Carpenter (1979: 220-233; 1991: 11-21), McNaughton (1981: 67-73; 1984: 60-4; and 1985: 127-147) and Preston (1976: 123-174) all of whom have examined various aspects of Barbeau's career with the National Museum of Canada.

---

1. Alan Lomax. Letter to Marius Barbeau October, 1950. Lomax correspondence, Barbeau Collection, Ottawa: Museum of Civilization.

Despite the unnecessary detail and lack of analysis, I am glad to have this book for several reasons. The chronology of Barbeau's life (p. 397-403,) a list of Barbeau's principal works (p. 404-413,) and a glossary are all useful for future researchers, providing valuable background information. As well there are many little things which one can find out by reading between the lines. For example, in drawing upon the massive collection located at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Nowry has allowed us a glimpse of the contacts Barbeau maintained in Canada and abroad.

As Nowry points out, in doing this biography he had an enormous amount of material to sift through. Therefore it is understandable that there are gaps and jumps. The files in the Barbeau collection at the Museum of Civilization are massive. Largely this is a reflection of Barbeau himself. Over the years he corresponded with numerous individuals and kept letters and documentation on many subjects, and he appears to have thrown out nothing. Nowry's biography therefore does represent a start at deciphering the various pieces of Barbeau's contributions to anthropology and folklore in Canada.

Barbeau was well connected socially and academically and he had a unique ability to wield considerable influence and make things happen. As Lacourcière in his interview with Nowry notes, Barbeau "opened up new fields of research everywhere he passed. So someone can go further and many people went further; but they always find him on their way because he was at the entrance of every new field of work, of research, in those cultural domains" (p. 393).

In this accounting of Barbeau and his activities Nowry has just skimmed the surface. Undoubtedly there is much more to be said about the mystique of Marius Barbeau. What is needed now is some theoretical analysis to stitch together the fieldnotes.

## References

- Carpenter, Carole H. 1979. *Many Voices: A Study of Folklore Activities in Canada and Their Role in Canadian Culture*. Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, National Museum of Man Mercury Series, Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies, 26.
- Carpenter, Carole H. 1991. "Politics and Pragmatism in early North American Folklore Scholarship." *Canadian Folklore Canadien*, 13, 1: 11-21.
- McNaughton, Janet. 1985. "French-Canadian Nationalism and the Beginnings of Folklore Studies in Quebec." *Canadian Folklore Canadien*, 7, 1-2: 127-47.

- McNaughton, Janet. 1984. "C. Marius Barbeau and the Origins Controversy." *Canadian Folk Music Journal*, 12: 60-4.
- McNaughton, Janet. 1981. "John Murray Gibbon and the Inter-War Folk Festivals." *Canadian Folklore Canadien*, 3, 1-2: 67-73.
- Preston, Richard J. 1976. "C. Marius Barbeau and the History of Canadian Anthropology." *The History of Canadian Anthropology*, J. Freedman (ed.). Proceedings, 3, Ottawa: Canadian Ethnology Society: 123-174.

ANNA KEARNEY GUIGNÉ

Memorial University of Newfoundland  
St. John's, Newfoundland

***Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul.*** By Raymond Van Dam. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993. P. 317, preface, key to abbreviations, introduction, list of editions and translations of period texts, bibliography, map, index, ISBN 0-691-02112-0 pbk.)

Raymond Van Dam is a professor of Roman History and a patristics scholar. It is clear from the character of three previous books that he has specialized in the study of the times, life and writings of Gregory, the sixth century bishop of Tours, whose collections of miracle stories provide the documentary inspiration for this fourth book. This reviewer is not otherwise very familiar with this period and place in history, nor with patristics scholarship. However, I find *Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* to be rich in materials and methods that relate to those of anthropologists and folklorists.

Van Dam declares his commitment to "the conservative application of comparative studies," since, in his view, the subject of saints' cults, relics, and miracles demands an interdisciplinary use of up-to-date methodologies, as well as the deployment of comparative material from other periods and other disciplines (p. 6-7). Not unexpectedly, he reveals his particular debt to an anthropological approach, but not before concentrating on the historical and biographical settings in Chapters One and Two. In the first chapter Van Dam emphasizes the complex structure of tensions of rival authority characterizing Gaul after the demise of Roman administration, in the context of the growing influence of Christianity affecting all levels of society, and during the Merovingian dynasty of Frankish kings in northern Gaul. Here he weaves an