

Jeff A. Webb, *The Voice of Newfoundland: A Social History of the Broadcasting Corporation of Newfoundland, 1939-1949* by Corey Slumkoski

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a whole, with some of the objects, such as the 1931 Newfoundland fifty cent bi-plane airmail stamp, picking up multiple threads of the story.

At the end of the book, the glossary of lesser-known Newfoundland vocabulary used in the story, such as “fish scales” and “yaffles” is helpful, although the mini-narrative using them all that has no direct connection to the story (“Ye stunned townie, stop tossing ye fish scales and trade me your sausages for my yaffle before the crackie gets them”) is not really necessary. Having instead some brief historical notes about Newfoundland Airways and the postal system would have been more interesting and useful. Still, visually smart with a well-written story and high production values, *Johnny and the Gipsy Moth* is among the stronger illustrated books produced in Newfoundland in the past ten years. It will not set the world of children’s literature on fire, but it is a solid addition to a growing body of works that portray elements of Newfoundland’s history for younger readers.

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Jeff A. Webb, *The Voice of Newfoundland: A Social History of the Broadcasting Corporation of Newfoundland, 1939-1949* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009). ISBN 0802095534

WEBB’S *THE VOICE OF NEWFOUNDLAND* is an important and welcome contribution to the fields of Newfoundland and broadcasting history. A member of Memorial University’s Department of History, Webb has long examined the history of broadcasting, having completed a doctoral thesis on radio broadcasting in the Maritimes and Newfoundland and publishing an article on *The Barrelman* show that has been reprinted in two popular collections of readings. Here he provides a monograph-length treatment of the Broadcasting Corporation of Newfoundland (BCN) during the critical years leading up to Newfoundland’s entry into Confederation.

While the primary audience will likely be regional scholars, this is a book that will have resonance beyond the Atlantic Canadian scholarly community since a

study of the BCN presents an opportunity to examine several important themes in radio broadcasting historiography. As Webb notes, most histories of broadcasting corporations focus on one of four main themes: local stations, national broadcasters, private stations, and publicly-owned stations. Over the course of the 1930s and 1940s the BCN and its immediate predecessor, the Voice of Newfoundland (VONF), filled all of these roles — it originated in St. John’s, but grew to serve the needs of all Newfoundlanders with expanded stations in Corner Brook and Gander. Likewise, the VONF was originally private but turned public in 1939 when it was purchased by BCN. The history of Newfoundland broadcasting is, therefore, uniquely positioned to reveal broader trends in Canadian and North American broadcasting history.

Through six chapters and an epilogue Webb tracks the ways that the state attempted to use the BCN to mould Newfoundland culture and society. Chapter 1 sets the stage by examining the development of private radio broadcasting in Newfoundland through the 1920s and 1930s until the 1934 arrival of the Commission of Government, which founded the BCN to use the medium to provide for the moral improvement of the impoverished population. Chapter 2 details the Commission’s attempts to promote its reconstruction efforts — efforts that eventually fell by the wayside with the outbreak of the Second World War. In Chapter 3 the ways that radio broadcasting was used to promote the seemingly contradictory goals of creating an imagined community of Newfoundlanders while simultaneously promoting the integration of Newfoundland into a North American style of life are explained. Chapter 4 highlights how the state used radio to mobilize society during the war through such things as recruitment and the maintenance of morale, while Chapter 5 is particularly strong in covering how radio promoted public engagement during the often bitter Confederation debates. The final chapter shows how, with the end of the war, the BCN returned to its original goal of promoting a Newfoundland culture, and the brief epilogue extends the analysis into the post-Confederation era by providing an overview of the BCN’s integration into the Canadian broadcasting system.

In writing a social and cultural history of Newfoundland broadcasting, Webb does more than focus on the bureaucratic history of the BCN. Instead, he situates the BCN within the context of North American broadcasting history by treating Newfoundland radio broadcasting as a dialogue between content producers and listeners. Producers broadcasted both international and local programs, and listeners would adopt those cultural forms that had resonance. Listening was thus a “creative act” whereby listeners took from programs meanings that did not necessarily reflect producers’ intentions. Moreover, radio broadcasting was not a one-way street; listeners affected what was being broadcast by submitting material for the airwaves or letters that made their programming preferences known to producers and advertisers. In this manner, radio broadcasting contributed to the invention of a Newfoundland popular culture during the 1930s and 1940s, which was negotiated and renegotiated through this dialogue between producer and listener.

In his analysis Webb must, of necessity, depend more on the records of the content producer than of the listener. As he notes, much of 1930s and 1940s radio is ephemeral — once broadcast it is lost. Webb, therefore, relies on the bureaucratic records of the BCN, program scripts and the few remaining letters to the BCN from listeners that detail their opinions on what they heard. Perhaps oral history — accounts of what any surviving listeners recall listening to and why — might have helped balance this dialogue. Despite this minor quibble, Webb should be commended for providing us with an important book that explains the impact radio broadcasting had on the social, cultural and political history of modern Newfoundland.

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Barbara Rieti. *Making Witches: Newfoundland Traditions of Spells and Counterspells* Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008. ISBN 0773533605

RIETI'S *MAKING WITCHES* makes a significant contribution to the increasingly popular study of historic and contemporary witch traditions, as well as Newfoundland folk culture and regional history/culture. Prior to this work we had scant accessible information on the phenomenon outside Mark Ferguson's *Book of the Black Hearts* and Rieti's own article-length studies.

In tone, organization, methodology and theoretical perspective this text is the offspring of her earlier work on witches but, perhaps, its affinity is closest to her study of Newfoundland fairy-lore. As in her earlier studies, Rieti situates narratives and practices of witchcraft in the particular historically situated, socio-economic relations of outport and rural Newfoundland. The section on social relations is especially important and acts as a tonic against exoticizing and marginalizing witch studies. Rather, Rieti argues that social reproduction under the truck system was characterized by customary norms of reciprocity and managed through a complex kinship system. Therefore, like many authors on the subject such as Keith Thomas and Norbert Schindler, Rieti argues that "reciprocity in all its permutations is the lynchpin of witch lore...." If this were the extent of her exercise that may be enough but, like her work on fairy-lore, the author attempts to foreground, not only the logic of witchcraft but the contextually variant expression and narration of the phenomenon.

Rieti exploits two data sources, contemporary interviews and the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA). Of the latter she mines the material collected since the 1960s by both specialists and students. Keenly aware of both the strengths and weaknesses of archival material, Rieti notes that the lack of full recording of witch practices has distorted our impression of the tradition, relying, as it does, on summaries of the most easily