

Calvin Hollett. *Beating Against the Wind: Popular Opposition to Bishop Feild and Tractarianism in Newfoundland and Labrador*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016. ISBN 978-0-7735-4736-0 (paper)

Rebecca Ralph

Volume 32, Number 1, Spring 2017

URI: [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nflds32\\_1br05](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nflds32_1br05)

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Faculty of Arts, Memorial University

ISSN

1719-1726 (print)

1715-1430 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Ralph, R. (2017). Review of [Calvin Hollett. *Beating Against the Wind: Popular Opposition to Bishop Feild and Tractarianism in Newfoundland and Labrador*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016. ISBN 978-0-7735-4736-0 (paper)]. *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies*, 32(1), 259–263.

Calvin Hollett. *Beating Against the Wind: Popular Opposition to Bishop Feild and Tractarianism in Newfoundland and Labrador*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016. ISBN 978-0-7735-4736-0 (paper)

In his second book, Calvin Hollett skilfully and thoughtfully interweaves historical analysis with nautical metaphors and imagery to create a revisionist history of Bishop Edward Feild's episcopate. Hollett's new work, much like his previous book, *Shouting, Embracing, and Dancing with Ecstasy: The Growth of Methodism in Newfoundland, 1774–1874* (2010), is a popular history that takes people's religious beliefs seriously. Hollett's focus on clergy and the people they interacted with challenges the portrait presented by Newfoundland and Labrador religious historiography of Feild as a good administrator. Previous scholars, such as Peter Coffman (2008) and Frederick Jones (1971), have written engaging studies about Feild's involvement in politics and his success in increasing the number of Anglican priests and in building Gothic churches. Jones's work did engage with the controversies that surrounded Feild's actions, but was focused on the perspectives of the Bishop and others among the elite.

*Beating Against the Wind* departs from previous works by exploring the day-to-day contests over the nature of Anglican spirituality and worship, privileging the perspectives of the diverse group of people who opposed Feild. By taking this approach, Hollett reconstructs a society wherein many people held liberal Protestant values, which shaped their communities and resulted in people exercising great autonomy in the face of outside colonial institutions. Hollett's work makes an important contribution by demonstrating the importance of including many voices to understand the complex and dynamic nature of Christianity in Newfoundland and Labrador society.

The book begins with a short discussion of people's resistance to colonial authorities, biographical details about Feild, and a skilful transatlantic-focused analysis of the Tractarian movement and its relationship to evangelical Protestantism. Hollett then provides case

studies of Feild's relationships with the different regions throughout his diocese, excluding Bermuda. Hollett's chapter titles quote Feild's comments about how people would not conform to his will, and then Hollett provides evidence to challenge Feild's depictions by helping readers understand people's reasons for opposing him. For Hollett, Feild was a hard man who sought to impose an Oxford-based form of Anglican spirituality on the people of his colonial diocese. "His Anglicanism was a 'God in House' religion" (293). Unfortunately for Feild, his sombre and awe-filled Tractarianism was resisted by people who preferred a more joyous expression of faith. In taking this approach, Hollett reconstructs an intimate portrait of both Feild and various communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

One of the great successes of Hollett's work is to recover different voices and reactions to Feild's Tractarianism, which emphasized the formal church and its careful liturgy. This is done through an impressive analysis of religious and secular sources, including the perspectives of clergy, laypersons, parishioners, teachers, fishers, merchants, and colonial governors. For example, Hollett explores narratives such as the pamphlet war with Richard Collett in Harbour Buffett. Hollett argues that issues such as withholding church services in response to people not contributing to the church infuriated large portions of communities (185–223). Another striking example of Feild's disregard for people's financial struggles was his sending of Cyrus Gathercole to Burin, with instructions to press hard for subscriptions for the Church Society, shortly after a hurricane and depressed fishing season (233–35). Feild's focus on financial self-sufficiency was an important factor in alienating people throughout the colony.

Feild wanted to control the people of his diocese; however, despite sending ministers selected from England and men trained at his theological college, compromise with evangelical tendencies was the rule of the day. Feild could not control people's decision to convert to or at least affiliate with Methodism. He also failed to control clergymen and Anglican Newfoundland School Society teachers, many of whom were evangelical Protestants. In discouraging baptism and marriage in

the home, even by a priest, Feild tried to force people into a Gothic box. Also, his clergy were frequently unwilling and at times simply unable to meet his Tractarian expectations. This narrative clearly undermines the image of Feild as an excellent administrator. Hollett argues, convincingly, that Bishop Feild is more properly understood as a man who struggled greatly to implement his vision of Anglicanism and, in the end, to enforce his entitlement to determine his flock's will. Hollett notes that while Feild sailed up and down the coasts, he spent much of his time aboard his ship and enjoyed entertaining people aboard the ship in an environment he could control. Further, in his own writing Feild comes off as cold and distant. He held a rather negative attitude towards local people, frequently complaining in his writing about impropriety when he did spend time in communities and people's homes.

One of the most impressive aspects about Hollett's work is that it is truly a work of Newfoundland and Labrador history. *Beating Against the Wind* demonstrates the plurality of society in the nineteenth century and the vibrant role that religion played in everyday life. In examining the various regions in Feild's episcopate, Hollett juxtaposes Feild's characterizations with examples of resistance and the perspectives of the people who rejected Tractarian Anglicanism. This approach reinforces Hollett's argument by demonstrating that despite his love of the sea, which brought Feild into contact with his flock, he continually failed to connect with people because he consistently tried to impose his vision of Anglicanism instead of accommodating local views and customs. Even on the south and west coasts, where Feild had more success, his priests still incorporated evangelical elements and struggled in their travels to connect with people in communities throughout their missions.

Hollett convincingly demonstrates that evangelical Protestantism was part of the social fabric throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. Its popularity was in part a response to the fragile and harsh nature of life in the colony, which resulted in people needing immediate access to God. Another factor that affected the prominence of evangelical

Protestantism was the accessibility of clergy and religious services. This discussion is a major strength of Hollett's work, as it shows how seasonal mobility was a big obstacle for Tractarian-leaning Anglican clergy because of the importance of worship in ecclesio-logically "correct" churches. Methodists, unlike Anglicans, encouraged lay leadership, which appealed to people's sense of autonomy over their religious beliefs and practices. The discussion of popular Protestantism and evangelical Anglicanism is remarkably rich, especially Hollett's convincing demonstration of the fluidity of some people's denominational identities. However, more discussion of why denominational identities mattered to various Anglicans would further deepen historical understanding of people's attachment to the Church of England.

Hollett's careful historical analysis clearly shows that people actively shaped the religious character of their communities, choosing spiritual practices that suited their needs and beliefs. Feild, to some extent, shaped the outward image of Anglicanism in Newfoundland and Labrador, but he simply failed to define its character, which was left to its adherents. While Hollett does take care to show that Feild was at times open to limited compromise and cared deeply about people, his commitment to his vision of the Church of England defined his conduct and relationship with the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Hollett's work reconstructs a more inclusive portrait of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, inviting future scholars to further explore how people exercised autonomy in their interactions with colonial, religious, and governmental institutions.

## References

- Coffman, Peter. *Newfoundland Gothic*. Quebec City: Editions MultiMondes, 2008.
- Hollett, Calvin. *Shouting, Embracing, and Dancing with Ecstasy: The Growth of Methodism in Newfoundland, 1774–1874*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010.

Jones, Frederick. "Bishop Feild: A Study in Politics and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Newfoundland." Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge University, 1971.

Rebecca Ralph  
University of Calgary