

Louisbourg Revisited

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4) will support a class as well as an ethnoreligious interpretation and so will Howe's commitment to railway-building and his desire to bring in cheap Irish labourers (or at least ones who knew their proper place in society).²⁷ Moreover, the co-partners bill which he supported in 1848 appears to have been a clear piece of class legislation (II, p. 9). What we need is a clearer picture of Howe's financial interests, an assessment of his attitude toward that ambiguous profession of journalism, and a more detailed description of his personal life-style before we can identify the influence of class-consciousness on Howe's behaviour.²⁸

It would be unfair to condemn Beck for not doing what he did not set out to do. Within its own terms this is a satisfying book. But it will not end the search for the definitive biography of Howe. How could it? Each generation re-writes its history and Howe will undoubtedly retain his fascination to future generations of Nova Scotian historians who will apply new questions and open new lines of inquiry. One thing is certain. Much of the groundwork for any future study of Howe has been laid by Beck in this careful and meticulously researched biography.

P.A. BUCKNER

27 Howe's reaction to the Gourlay shanty episode was a typical response to expressions of discontent by impoverished Irish labourers. See Ruth Bleasdale, "Class Conflict on the Canals of Upper Canada in the 1840s", *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 7 (Spring, 1981), pp. 10-39.

28 Good examples of the kind of examination that are necessary can be seen in Brian Young, *George-Etienne Cartier: Montreal Bourgeois* (Kingston and Montreal, 1981) and J.K. Johnston, "John A. Macdonald", in J.M.S. Careless, ed., *The Pre-Confederation Premiers: Ontario Government Leaders, 1841-1867* (Toronto, 1980), pp. 197-245.

Louisbourg Revisited

MORE THAN 20 YEARS AGO, when I began research for my Ph.D. dissertation on New England and Louisbourg in the 1740s, my supervisor Mason Wade felt that with my interest in 18th century Nova Scotia such a thesis would provide the base for a series of studies dealing with the so-called "French Gibraltar of North America". I could see myself concentrating for the rest of my academic life on Louisbourg but always within a North American historiographical context.

When I began my research in New England, I soon discovered that other scholars were scouring the Yankee archives looking for any material relating to Louisbourg. It was in late 1963 in the Massachusetts Historical Society in Boston — I remember that precise moment as though it were yesterday — that I learned that Louisbourg was to be reconstructed and that it was the intention of the Canadian government to ensure that the reconstruction project was firmly

buttressed by sophisticated historical research and the collecting of all relevant material in any way impinging upon the development of Louisbourg in the 18th century. I was also informed by my fellow Louisbourg researcher that in all likelihood the historical research team would eventually publish a series of monographs dealing with all aspects of 18th century Louisbourg life. I should realize, he added, that I was competing against a team and a government. He even wondered whether my thesis proposal now made any sense and whether I was merely spitting into the wind blowing from Ottawa. I too wondered.

After a few days of morbid introspection, I decided that the thesis was still viable but that my long-term research plan definitely was not. I was determined to finish my dissertation before the Department of Northern Affairs made my research redundant. In 1965 the thesis was finished and two years later it was published as *Yankees at Louisbourg*.

During the past two decades, scores of historical researchers have worked on the "Louisbourg Project". But it has not been until recent years that their work has resulted in major monographs. And the evidence suggests that the "Golden Age" of Louisbourg historical scholarship is only beginning. At its best, this scholarship is absolutely first-rate, even within the general context of 18th century North American and Anglo-French historiography. But, at its worst, it is second or third rate, even within the far more narrow confines of 18th century Nova Scotia studies.

J.S. McLennan's *Louisbourg from its Foundation to its Fall, 1713-58* first published in 1918, remains, despite its weaknesses, the best available historical overview of Louisbourg in the 18th century. W. Wood's *The Great Fortress: A Chronicle of Louisbourg* (1928) and Fairfax Downey's *Louisbourg: Key to a Continent* (1965) are books better left unopened; Downey's, in particular, is an embarrassment both to the author, and his publisher, Prentice-Hall. It is noteworthy, however, that McLennan's *Louisbourg* has worn so well and continues to inform and shape all recent Louisbourg scholarship.

Until the late 1970s, at least, perhaps because of the influence of McLennan, Wood and others, most of the serious historical work on Louisbourg concentrated on the two sieges of 1745 and 1758. The sieges provided historical documentation in concentrated form as well as a marvellous mix of "character and circumstances" which have attracted and perhaps seduced scholars. And in the process, by concentrating on the two sieges, there has been a serious distortion of the historical past. The best of the new Louisbourg scholarship is obviously reacting against this older siege emphasis and is helping to create a far more accurate and sensitively-crafted historical record.

Despite the fact that Louisbourg's history spanned only half a century, and Louisbourg's maximum population was likely never larger than 4500, it should be remembered that throughout the 1720 to 1758 period the French fortress town was one of the busiest commercial centres on the Atlantic seaport — fourth only to Boston, New York and Charleston. Moreover, largely because of

the importance of the cod fishery, the per capita value of total exports from Cape Breton to France was, in the late 1730s, eight times larger than that from New France. In fact, it has been estimated that Louisbourg's "dried cod exports were three times more valuable to the French economy than Canada's furs".¹ Louisbourg was obviously more than a Vauban-style fortress — a "Dunkirk held at England's head"; it was much more than an area of less than 100 acres enclosed by a wall of fortifications. Louisbourg was a major North American military and commercial centre — a symbol of French imperial power in the New World. And in deciding, in the early 1960s, to reconstruct about one-fourth of the original garrison-town, the federal government endeavoured to ensure that the new Louisbourg would be the symbol of Canadian historical restoration excellence. In order to achieve this admirable goal, it was necessary first to have prepared hundreds of historical reports based upon a superb archives housing close to a million documents from almost every corner of the Western world. And these reports have provided a firm historical foundation for the best of the new historical work dealing with 18th century Louisbourg. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that all of the recently published books dealing with Louisbourg have been written by scholars who have been or are presently employed by the Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Park.

The best of these books, by far, is Christopher Moore's *Louisbourg Portraits: Life in an Eighteenth-Century Garrison Town* (Toronto, Macmillan of Canada, 1982). His imaginative reconstruction of Louisbourg's social life is both innovative and brilliantly executed. He has made remarkable use of the available primary sources, fleshing into two-dimensional perspectives often obscure personages from Louisbourg's 18th century historical record. And he has done so by locating them and their lives firmly within the framework of modern 18th century historiography. With good reason Professor James Axtell has contended that Moore's book "with deceptive ease" has "set new standards for scholarly and popular history". According to Axtell, "Moore has crafted a personalization of the past that, if it could be widely emulated, would do much to bring back a deserting audience to history". *Louisbourg Portraits* is therefore perceived as a most unusual Canadian book; it is historical writing which American scholars should not only emulate but also "envy".² By carefully using all available primary material Moore did not have to, as he has put it, "invent a single character episode or event". According to Moore, "*Louisbourg Portraits* is history: there is no line of dialogue that is not taken from a document, and I have not had to transpose events in time or place". Furthermore,

Events described in *Louisbourg Portraits* happened; the people to whom they occurred existed; and the records have long been available to scholars.

1 *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, Vol. XLI, No. 1 (January 1984), p. 154.

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 153-5.

Where I have speculated on motivation or attitude or emotion, I have tried to make plain both the speculation and the historical evidence that supports it (p. 287).

Despite Moore's disclaimer it is clear that the least satisfactory sections of his book are those dealing with motivation. For example, and this is only one example, Moore has written the following about Jean Lelarge, the son of a Louisbourg carpenter, who eventually became a well-known French naval captain:

All his life Jean Lelarge *seems* to have done pretty much as he pleased. At every step he neglected filial duty as the widow Lelarge *might have* interpreted it: choosing a career at sea in preference to the family trade, ranging off on his own while his family suffered through the smallpox epidemic, seeking his own fortunes when he *might have* been contributing to the family estate. *Perhaps* it had galled his hardworking mother to see her son's capricious ways rewarded with the string of successes that had left him largely free from dependence on his family. Lelarge's private betrothal to Louise Samson *seems* to have been another step taken without care for his family's interest or concern. When he decided quite on his own that it was time to marry, his mother *may have* held back her consent merely to make her wayward and youthful son observe the proprieties for once. If he would not humble himself to plead for her approval, then it *might* be good for the proud captain, the independent world traveller, to cool his heels until he was undeniably old enough to act for himself. *If* such was her motive, the widow must have been horrified by the precipitate action that her refusal provoked in her headstrong son (p. 181, italics added).

After a while, the "mights", the "ifs", the "seems", the "appears", and the "mays" get in the way. Rather than safely qualifying Moore's observations about possible motivation, these words begin to raise fundamental questions, in the reader's mind, about the actual accuracy of these sections dealing with motivation. Of course no historian can ever be certain about motivation; but in a book of this kind — a book which creatively reconstructs the past by squeezing meaning from a variety of often obscure sources — the cumulative impact of these qualifiers, as the author's story unfolds, creates some problems. These are not, it should be stressed, major flaws but rather they merely underscore the tremendous strengths of the rest of the volume.

Moore stresses in his Preface that his scholarly task is to try to understand the inhabitants of Louisbourg "within the context of their times" (p. viii). The contextual richness of this study may be traced to his mastery of the available primary source material and to his ability to link fragmentary references into a sophisticated and convincing conceptual framework. He succeeds in breathing

life and vitality into 18th-century men and women. Moore focuses on six individuals — Louis Davory, a sailor who was charged with theft in Louisbourg in 1746, Marie-Louise Cruchon and her husband Jacques Rolland who were married in 1742, Charles Penault, a simple fisherman, Jean Lelarge, the successful naval captain, and Jodocus Koller, the Swiss mercenary who served with distinction during the Anglo-New England siege of 1745.

For Moore, these 18th century Louisbourg inhabitants are the means whereby he can analyse a myriad of aspects of Louisbourg life. There are superb discussions, for example, of the court system, architecture, religion, slavery, the fishery, marriage, siege warfare, commerce and family life. Moore succeeds admirably in linking specific people and events at a particular period of time with both the past and the future. In doing so he has written a sophisticated social history of 18th century Louisbourg. His book is now the bench mark for other scholars interested not only in 18th century Louisbourg but also 18th century North American social history. Moore's *Louisbourg Portraits* has put him on the cutting edge of North American 18th century scholarship.

This same point, however, cannot be made concerning A.J.B. Johnston's two books, *The Summer of 1744: A Portrait of Life in 18th-Century Louisbourg* (Ottawa, Parks Canada, 1983) and *Religion in Life at Louisbourg, 1713-1758* (Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984) or of Bernard Pothier's *Course à L'Accadie: Journal de campagne de Francois Du Pont Duvivier en 1744* (Moncton, Editions d'Acadie, 1982) — each of which, for different reasons, is a disappointing study. B.A. Balcom's slim 88-page *The Cod Fishery of Isle Royale, 1713-1758* (Ottawa, Parks Canada, 1984), on the other hand, though not as significant or as suggestive as Moore's study, is nevertheless solidly researched and on the whole cogently and lucidly written. It is a noteworthy addition to 18th century North American economic history.

Johnston's *The Summer of 1744* breaks very little new research ground, merely reiterating arguments put forward earlier in McLennan's *Louisbourg* and in my *Yankees at Louisbourg*. The descriptive narrative carefully follows the approach of earlier scholars and little attempt has been made, in the Moore manner, to locate people and events sensitively in the context of their times. *The Summer of 1744* in a historiographical sense, looks longingly back at a past which, for many, has become increasingly irrelevant.

In *Religion in Life at Louisbourg*, Johnston certainly does break new research ground. His chapters dealing with the Récollets, the Brothers of Charity and the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame contain a great deal of useful material, as does his final chapter, entitled "Faith, Morals, and Popular Customs". In this chapter Johnston discusses among other things, the role of the midwife in 18th century Louisbourg and the very low illegitimacy rate of some 4.5 per cent. There are also worthwhile sections dealing with "Confession, Communion, and Confirmation" and with marriage, pre-nuptial conception (approximately 10 per cent compared with almost 50 per cent in some Yankee com-

munities), and death and funerals.

In his much too brief conclusion, Johnston argues that economic, geographic and demographic forces help to explain many of the differences which existed between religious life in Louisbourg and in New France. In addition, he contends that the "relative weakness" of the church as an institution not only affected how the "religious" carried out their responsibilities but also how the inhabitants actually responded to the Catholicism being dispensed. Johnston, in particular, underscores the "profound parsimony" of the inhabitants and their intense dependence on others to spend money for their religious behalf.

Yet, instead of squeezing nuances and insights from his material in an imaginative and confident manner, Johnston seems content to permit the detail of his descriptive analysis to energize his narrative and to shape his few conclusions. Inadequate attention has been devoted to defining and describing evolving popular religion in Louisbourg and too little stress has been placed on the comparative dimension. There is a superb index but a rather limited bibliography. Of greater importance is the fact that Johnston has not been well served by his publisher. There are too many weak transitions and too many convoluted sentences and too much repetition. There is, in other words, in both form and content a hurried quality to this book and the inadequacies manifest themselves so clearly largely because of the remarkable strengths of *Louisbourg Portraits*.

Most of the general criticism applied to Johnston's *The Summer of 1744* may also be applied to Pothier's *Course à L'Accadie*. Most of the book, it should be stressed, consists of Duvivier's 1744 journal, a journal which describes, often in graphic detail, the unsuccessful French attempt to capture Annapolis Royal. Other scholars have made use of the Duvivier journal and it is not clear why it merited publication as a separate document. Certainly, the historical introduction says little that is new and moreover, it does not take into account Barry Moody's important Ph.D. thesis "A Just and Disinterested Man: The Nova Scotia Career of Paul Mascarene, 1710-1752", completed in 1976. The biographical detail about Duvivier has already been published in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Vol. IV* by Pothier and Professor Terry Crowley. Consequently, the same question must be asked of this slim volume as was asked of Johnston's *The Summer of 1744*, does it merit publication? Some would say yes, some would say no.

Balcom's *Cod Fishery* certainly merited publication. In my view it contains the best brief discussion of how the 18th century cod fishery actually functioned — at each stage. Balcom is particularly impressive in his discussion of the economics of the fishery and its major participants. He convincingly argues that the Isle Royale cod fishery was of greater value to the Mother Country than the fur trade of New France. Moreover, "dried fish exports formed a crucial link in the establishing of a triangular flow of goods between France, Isle Royale and the French West Indies" (p. 65). Balcom has succeeded, in a rather understated manner, in questioning the central role given to the fur trade in any discussion of

France's involvement in North America. This is no mean achievement.

During the next few years there will, without question, be more books published about Louisbourg. And they, like the ones published in the early 1980s, will be of uneven quality and will owe a great deal to Parks Canada. Publishers, however, should be discouraged from trying to transform serviceable "historical reports" prepared for the Fortress of Louisbourg Historic Park into books which too often may be regarded as being of limited importance. Moore and Balcom have certainly pointed in the direction that future Louisbourg historiography should go. It should carefully avoid the two sieges and concentrate on larger issues which can be confidently located within the framework of 18th century North American scholarship.

G.A. RAWLYK

The Ambivalent Loyalists

A CENTURY AGO, WHEN THE LOYALIST CENTENARY was being celebrated, the picture seemed reasonably clear. According to men like William Canniff and William Kirby, the Loyalists were a highly-principled and well-educated elite who chose to grapple with the hardships of a northern wilderness environment rather than submit to the tyranny of democratic republicanism. United by their ideology and their suffering, in this view, the Loyalists formed a close-knit community characterized by an unswerving fidelity to the British Empire and the "real liberty" of the British Constitution. In more recent years, scholars such as Esther Clark Wright and Neil MacKinnon have effectively challenged the comforting certainties of the traditional interpretation.¹ While the romantic 19th-century image is no longer accepted in its entirety, the heroic view has nevertheless refused to give up the ghost altogether. The result is a marked ambivalence in current Loyalist historiography. Along with sophisticated scholarly studies of the Loyalists' ideology, experiences and legacy, the current Bicentennial year has also produced books and articles written primarily to praise the Loyalists and honour their heritage.

The state of Loyalist studies before the Bicentennial is surveyed in Robert S. Allen's *Loyalist Literature: An Annotated Bibliographic Guide to the Writings on the Loyalists of the American Revolution* (Toronto and Charlottetown, Dundurn Press, 1982). The book is divided into four sections: general references, the American Revolution, the diaspora and the Loyalist legacy. Anyone moving into the field will find it a good starting point, although Allen's obvious sympathy for the Loyalists occasionally leads him into questionable judgements. It

¹ Esther Clark Wright, *The Loyalists of New Brunswick* (Fredericton, 1955); Neil MacKinnon, "The Loyalist Experience in Nova Scotia, 1783-1791", Ph.D. thesis, Queen's University, 1974.