

**Courville, Serge, ed. (1998) Atlas historique du Québec.  
Population et territoire. Sainte-Foy, PUL, 200 p. (ISBN  
2-7637-7494-6)**

**Cole Harris**

Volume 42, numéro 116, 1998

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/022746ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/022746ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Département de géographie de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0007-9766 (imprimé)

1708-8968 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

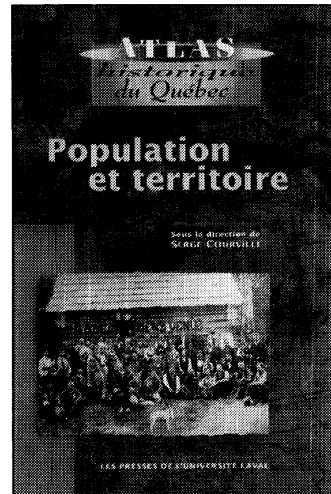
Harris, C. (1998). Compte rendu de [Courville, Serge, ed. (1998) Atlas historique du Québec. Population et territoire. Sainte-Foy, PUL, 200 p. (ISBN 2-7637-7494-6)]. *Cahiers de géographie du Québec*, 42(116), 288–291.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/022746ar>

bas de page. Le site est donc à visiter, mais il ne remplacera aucunement le contenu de ce très recommandable manuel de SIG:

<http://weber.u.washington.edu/~chrisman/explor/index.html>

Yaïves Ferland  
Département de géographie  
Université McGill

COURVILLE, Serge, ed. (1998) *Atlas historique du Québec. Population et territoire*. Sainte-Foy, PUL, 200 p. (ISBN 2-7637-7494-6)



This is the second volume in a series of historical atlases of Quebec. It is preceded by *Le pays laurentien au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (1995), and recently followed by *Le territoire* (1997). Directed by geographer Serge Courville and historian Normand Séguin, the series is exceedingly ambitious: it is interdisciplinary; involves many of the principal scholars working on early Quebec; relies on a combination of texts, maps and illustrations; and is committed to a spatial analysis of the evolution of Québec. Its volumes are handsome and costly. It is, in short, a major undertaking that draws on a not insignificant portion of the talent and resources available for the study of early Quebec.

*Population et territoire* is a set of essays followed, in most cases, by short cartographic analyses. The essays range very broadly: the first, by Serge Courville and John Dickinson, are on indigenous settlement and cultural change, and the last by Paul Villeneuve and Marcel Bélanger, are on the changing recent dynamics of population and territory in Quebec. In between are essays on demography (Hubert Charbonneau *et al.*) and the pattern of rural settlement (Alain Laberge and Jacques Mathieu) during the French regime; on the settlement of the Saguenay (Gérard Bouchard *et al.*), on the growth of Montreal, in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Sherry Olson), and on regional depopulation and emigration (Clermont Dugas and Yves Roby). All these essays are works of synthesis. They are not so much intended to present new information as to summarize current data and understandings. This is as it should be. An historical atlas can be expected to be up-to-date with current researches, but will rarely lead them.

The standard of all these essays is high, and I offer only a few somewhat scattered comments. John Dickinson gives a solid account of historical Native populations. He presents the consensus view about the demise of the St. Lawrence Iroquoians: they were exterminated or dispersed by warfare. Yet I wonder. There is little

---

evidence to support Henry Dobyn's claim that there was a hemispheric pandemic shortly after smallpox reached the Yucatan Peninsula in 1519, but Jesuits early in the 17<sup>th</sup> century reported serious population declines among Natives who had encountered fishermen around the Gulf of St. Lawrence in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. We know that some St. Lawrence Iroquoians fished and traded in the Gulf. My guess is that the St. Lawrence Iroquoians contracted new diseases from this quarter, and that their diminished populations were vulnerable to attacks from traditional enemies. There is no direct evidence however, and Dickinson is wisely cautious. More generally, and in the light of post-colonial literatures, there is ground to wonder about an emphasis on small, scattered, aboriginal populations that, in a book such as this, warrant an initial chapter and scant mention thereafter. The theorists of colonial culture would say that such intellectual agendas are complicit, worldwide, with the larger strategies of colonialism.

Hubert Charbonneau and his colleagues at the Université de Montréal provide a thorough summary of years of demographic research on the population of Canada before 1760, and some tantalizing suggestions about the relationship between these demographic statistics and the opportunities for families created by the relative abundance of land along the lower St. Lawrence during the French régime. The same topic is taken up by Alain Laberge and Jacques Mathieu. Their piece on the expansion of the ecumene during these years seems too brief, but their concluding analysis of the spatial dynamics of families is fascinating. The combination of, in some cases, seigneurial preference for certain peasant families and familial patterns of initial settlement and land acquisition, create an intricately textured countryside in which clusters of surnames dominate in different areas. This family and kin-centered differentiation of the countryside is, I am sure, at the heart of the cultural and spatial variation of early, rural Canada.

From this point, *Population et territoire* jumps over almost 100 years to consider the settlement of the Saguenay (which begins in the 1840s) and the rapid growth of Montreal in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The massive migration from the British Isles in the early-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century (directed principally, of course, towards Ontario and the American Middle West but leaving a large residue in Quebec) are not treated, nor the expansion of settlement in the Eastern Townships, nor the expansion of late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century settlement within the St. Lawrence lowland. In lieu of all this, two vignettes, both well done. Gérard Bouchard and his colleagues show the Saguenay to develop in part as a later phase of the demographically driven, family and farm-oriented expansion that dominated the countryside during the French régime, and also in response to industrial capital in forestry and, eventually, hydroelectricity and pulp and paper. The most striking finding, perhaps, is that in the Saguenay the demographic characteristics of town and countryside were almost identical. The towns were not a world apart, a fact explained partly by their small size, by close family relations between town and countryside and, probably, by the English domination of middle and upper management. Sherry Olson's splendid essay on Montreal also reveals the close imbrication of town and countryside. Even in 1901, a third of the French Canadians in Montreal had been born in the countryside; life in the city, as in the countryside, was a complex tissue of kin relations. What is perhaps more remarkable is that her analysis shows that such ties also characterized anglophone Montrealers, even the

---

Protestant bourgeoisie. Family ties animated neighbourhoods and underlayed cultural communities. Late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Montreal emerges as an intricate mosaic of different localities only somewhat orchestrated within the larger rhythms of the city.

Yves Roby provides a fine discussion of the huge migration of people from Quebec to the United States — some 900 000 people between 1840 and 1930 — that so affected the character of Quebec and the rest of Canada. Most departures for the United States were not initially definitive; people were looking for seasonal opportunity, in effect incorporating New England within the migratory patterns of the St. Lawrence lowland. Essentially the same migrations pushed Quebec to the limit of its arable land, and beyond. As Clermont Dugas shows in a careful, statistical analysis of regional depopulation in 20<sup>th</sup> century Quebec, there were 140 000 farms in the province in 1901, some 155 000 in 1941, but only 40 000 in 1991. This is a huge change with close analogues across the country. On the other hand, as Dugas points out, there has been relatively little absolute rural depopulation, and he is cautiously optimistic about the future of a countryside that, however, will be very different from the one that characterized rural Quebec for the last three centuries.

This theme is pursued, indirectly, by Paul Villeneuve, who offers a short but magisterial analysis of spatial change in Quebec since World War II. Whereas the first half of the century was characterized by strong urbanization, developments in the second have been more lateral: towards secondary cities, suburbs, and industrial work places beyond the agricultural lowlands. Basically he concludes — and a large weight of theory would agree with him — that these different milieux are becoming ever more integrated, the interactions between them more intricate. Marcel Bélanger's reflections that end the volume are rather more those of a poet or social philosopher than of a social scientist. He ranges across the centuries and spaces of Quebec, considering the effects of the sudden reversal of population pressure that marked the founding of the colony; the intimacy of local relations between people and territory as agricultural settlement expanded along the St. Lawrence; the imposed linearity of river, trade, and towns, and on to the abstract spaces of the planners and the continental attractions of technology and economy. He vacillates, it seems to me, between dismay at the cacophony of voices and the improbable juxtapositions that characterize contemporary Quebec and confidence that older structures survive this barrage. He reaches, spatially, for the soul of Quebec. I am sure I do not altogether understand him, partly because my French is not quite adequate to his elegant, elliptical prose, partly because I am not quite close enough to his Quebec.

Considered more broadly, I have three reactions to this book. The first — as I hope I have made clear — is that it is a huge, impressive work that reports some of the principal findings of years of careful scholarship. Serge Courville and Normand Séguin, under whose direction the series appears, and the many authors represented therein, have every reason to be proud of their creations.

---

The second is that this volume — *Population et territoire* — is not quite what its title claims it is. It is certainly not a comprehensive survey of the evolving population and territory of Quebec. In such terms, far too much has been left out. It is, rather, a series of fairly focused discussions with large holes between them. The reason for this is tied to the organization of the series. Given a first volume dealing with *Le pays laurentien au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, it is impossible to create subsequent thematic volumes that range evenly across space and time. In fact, much of the material relevant to *Population et territoire* is in volume I, some is in the third volume (for example, a discussion of the *rang*). This may be as it should. It does mean that to find what the atlas has to say about many topics one needs to consult all its volumes. Such organization gains in flexibility what it loses in coherence, volume by volume. One might have created a volume dealing with Quebec before, say 1800, another on the nineteenth century, a third on the province from 1900-1950, and a fourth from then to the present. Such a project, however, would have been bounded. An advantage of the present organization is that it is more responsive to work as it is available, and allows volumes to appear as long as there is funding for them and interesting material to present.

Finally, volume two of the series is only marginally an atlas. The cartographic sections following the essays are short and, overall, disappointing. The maps are not well integrated with the essays, and a great many of them rely on broad statistical regions that hide almost as much as they reveal. It is important, I think, to map lived-in space rather than statistical abstractions, and to make much more use of large scale (local) maps. For example, the family and kin concentrations examined by Laberge and Mathieu warrant a cartographic analysis they did not receive. Atlases reflect different balances between map and text, but in this one, to my mind, the balance is too heavily textual. In a series that emphasizes the spatial dimensions of a changing Quebec and that calls itself an atlas, maps deserve much more prominence.

Cole Harris  
Department of Geography  
University of British Columbia