

The Significance of the Sixteenth Century for Atlantic Regional Historians

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[See table of contents](#)

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Reviews/Revue

The Significance of the Sixteenth Century for Atlantic Regional Historians

The sixteenth-century history of the territories which were later to become known as the Atlantic region of Canada has received the attention of historians infrequently. In regard to European voyages of exploration, the period is well enough known, through a voluminous literature which includes such general works as Samuel Eliot Morison's *The European Discovery of America: The Northern Voyages, A.D. 500-1600* (New York, 1971); David B. Quinn, *England and the Discovery of America, 1481-1620* (New York, 1974); and Marcel Trudel, *Histoire de la Nouvelle-France: Les Vaines Tentatives, 1524-1603* (Montreal, 1963). The early chapters of Harold Adams Innis, *The Cod Fisheries: The History of an International Economy* (Toronto, 1940) and parts of Ch. de la Morandière's *Histoire de la Pêche Française de la Morue dans l'Amérique Septentrionale, des Origines à 1789* (2 vols., Paris, 1962) continue to offer insights into the origins of the European fisheries. What was happening on land, though, has hitherto attracted much less interest. There are, of course, exceptions, but major ones are few. One excepts A. G. Bailey's early ethno-history, *The Conflict of European and Eastern Algonkian Cultures, 1504-1700: A Study in Canadian Civilization* (Saint John, 1937; 2nd ed., Toronto, 1969), a seminal work which has only recently come to be recognised as such, after two editions and over forty years.¹ Exceptions too are the excellent monograph of Gillian T. Cell, *English Enterprise in Newfoundland, 1577-1660* (Toronto, 1969) and Cornelius J. Jaenen's recent reflections on French-Indian relationships in his *Friend and Foe: Aspects of French-Amerindian Cultural Contact in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Toronto, 1976). Neither of these works is chiefly concerned with the sixteenth century, nor is Jaenen chiefly concerned with what was to become the Atlantic region, but both are full of insights relevant to the period.² The forty or so biographies in Volume I of the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* which bear upon the Atlantic region in the sixteenth century comprise a further essential source. Although many are inevitably short and sketchy, they represent in most cases the triumph over the deficiencies of source material of such authors as Quinn, Trudel, Gustave Lanctot and L.-A. Vigneras.³

1 See also Bailey, "Retrospective Thoughts of an Ethnohistorian", in Canadian Historical Association, *Historical Papers*, 1977, pp. 20-3.

2 On the works of Jaenen and Bailey, see also Elisabeth Tooker, "Whites and Indians", *Acadiensis*, 7 (Autumn 1977), pp. 133-4. E. Palmer Patterson, *The Canadian Indian: A History Since 1500* (Don Mills, Ont., 1972) enunciates interesting approaches, but says little on the sixteenth century.

3 George W. Brown and Marcel Trudel, eds., *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. I (Toronto, 1966). In listing historical works on the region in this period, I have not included editions of discovery literature.

Beyond this short list, most of the significant work in this area has been done not by historians, but by researchers in other disciplines: archaeologists, anthropologists, geographers. This is not surprising, given that those who inhabited or visited the region in the sixteenth century were largely Indian, and that those Europeans who were present did not for the most part leave written evidence of their lives. Hence, the data which are available — consisting largely of oral traditions and archaeological evidence, with written primary sources scanty and hard to locate — can more easily satisfy the anthropologist than the historian. The cultural effects upon the Indians of north-eastern North America of initial contacts with Europeans, for example, as seen in the organisation of Indian hunting territories, were hotly debated among anthropologists from the 1930s on into the 1960s.⁴ An example of more recent anthropological work is that of Harold McGee, who has recently published a short but informative account of Micmac society before and during the period of European contact.⁵ Archaeological evidence can also be crucial to our understanding of the sixteenth century: if any illustration of this obvious truth is required, it can be found in the works of such archaeologists as David Sanger and James Tuck on the “prehistory” of Indian peoples in the region.⁶ Finally, a particularly fruitful example of the use of interdisciplinary techniques can be found in the work of Selma Barkham on the Basque whaling operations on the coast of the Labrador from the 1540s until the early years of the seventeenth century. By combining the techniques of the historian, the geographer and the archaeologist, in dealing with written evidence from Spanish archives and with the remnants of such Basque artifacts as roofing tiles and harpoons, Barkham has begun to reconstruct the development of a major industry which brought as many as 2000 Basques annually to Labrador at its height, which involved the building of permanent installations on shore, and which led to frequent references to Labrador in contemporary Spanish usage as “La Provincia de Terranova”.⁷

If historians have neglected the sixteenth-century past of the Atlantic region, it is largely because of the scarcity of written sources. Historians, like Robert Burns’s mouse when turned out of its nest by the plough, are timorous creatures when deprived of their documents. This is all the more true when familiar points of reference are absent. In the sixteenth century in North America the fore-

4 For a retrospective appraisal of this lengthy controversy, see Bailey, “Reappraisals”, in Bailey, *Conflict of Cultures* (2nd ed.), pp. xviii-xxiii.

5 Harold F. McGee, Jr., “The Micmac Indians: The Earliest Migrants” in Douglas F. Campbell, ed., *Banked Fires: The Ethnics of Nova Scotia* (Port Credit, Ont., 1978), pp. 17-25.

6 See, for example, David Sanger, “Passamaquoddy Bay Prehistory: A Summary”, *Bulletin of the Maine Archaeological Society*, 11 (1971), pp. 14-9; James A. Tuck, *Newfoundland and Labrador Prehistory* (Ottawa, 1976). On the latter study, see also L.F.S. Upton, “The Beothucks: Questions and Answers”, *Acadiensis*, 7 (Spring 1978), p. 151.

7 Selma Barkham, “The Basques: Filling a Gap in Our History Between Jacques Cartier and Champlain”, *Canadian Geographical Journal*, 96 (1978), pp. 8-19.

runners of modern communities had not yet begun to exist, nor even had modern names of places and geographical features. To be fair, the paucity of written records is a serious handicap for a conscientious historian. It is in the nature of history as a discipline that its practitioners seek to understand change through time, in all its complexity. Successful fulfilment of this task presupposes a certain precision and reliability of detail in source materials, to a degree not always available in oral traditions or even in archaeological data. Furthermore, there are other grounds on which one can understand the reluctance of Atlantic regional historians to venture into the sixteenth century. This is not the only part of North America which has been neglected in this period. With some exceptions, notably Carl Sauer's *Sixteenth Century North America: The Land and the People as Seen by the Europeans* (Berkeley, 1971), the whole historiography of sixteenth-century North America is scanty. Another consideration is that Atlantic regional historians have other neglected periods to attend to. The social and economic history of the region in the nineteenth century is only now beginning to receive the attention it deserves and needs. The seventeenth century, the crucial period of early European colonisation, has also been given short shrift until recently, and urgently needs further attention. There is much to be done, and the sixteenth century is only one of several deserving fields.

Nonetheless, neglect of the sixteenth century by historians is regrettable, partly because the techniques of the historian are needed in order to bring about a genuinely interdisciplinary approach to the study of this part of the Atlantic region's past. The historian has much to learn from the anthropologist, the archaeologist, and scholars of other disciplines. The historian also has much to impart, especially in introducing the precision which is an integral part of his labours to establish cause and effect, to identify significant changes and date them. Although the historian does not have a monopoly of the past, he has ways of examining the past which other researchers can ignore only at their peril. Even more importantly, historians of the sixteenth century are needed because of the sheer vital importance of that period in the overall history of what was to become the Atlantic region. The sixteenth century was a time of enormous and accelerating change. Not that previous times had been static — we are being forced by the work of archaeologists to revise longheld notions that Indian societies were unchanging — but now occurred the dramatic effects of early contacts between Indian and European. We have been accustomed in the past to be blinkered by trite categorisations, to assume that these processes of change belong to Indian history and have little relevance to anything else. They do, of course, form part of Indian history; but they also form part of the overall human history of the various peoples, whether native or European, who have inhabited the region. The sixteenth century was a time of social revolution among native peoples whose territories bordered on the Atlantic Ocean. It was also the time when Europeans of various nationalities began to make landings and to form the perceptions of North America and its peoples which would persist and evolve

until they eventually had a crucial effect upon the nature of the European colonies which were to be established after 1600.

For all of these reasons, it is most welcome to find the publication of two new books which comment extensively on the sixteenth-century period in what was to become the Atlantic region: David B. Quinn, *North America from Earliest Discovery to First Settlements: The Norse Voyages to 1612* (New York, Harper and Row, 1977); and Calvin Martin, *Keepers of the Game: Indian-Animal Relationships and the Fur Trade* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978). Neither work is concerned exclusively with the Atlantic region, and neither work is concerned exclusively with the sixteenth century, but the region in that period bulks large in both.

Quinn's study, an addition to the New American Nation Series, is by far the longer of the two. The 567 pages of text, which include a large number of maps and line drawings, are supplemented by 25 photographic plates and by an extensive bibliographical essay. Despite a somewhat misleading subtitle — which might tempt an unwary reader to expect to be informed only about Norse voyages — Quinn paints, as he himself puts it in the Preface, on a large canvas. His stated aims are modest, to the point of being self-effacing. He has set out "to provide a reasonably balanced view of the activities of those European peoples who discovered, explored and attempted to settle North America down to the time when the first colonies — Spanish, English and French — had taken root". Admitting the difficulties raised by the shortage of source materials, he offers "a report on existing knowledge, extended at some points by my own investigations" (p. xv). Quinn's modesty is excessive, as soon becomes clear from the solid foundations which he carefully lays down in the early chapters of the book. It is particularly promising to find that the first chapter discusses "the Amerindian context", and does so in a way informed by the best of recent specialized scholarship on the Indian; although its chief focus is on the Europeans, this is not a book which respects conventional compartments of knowledge, nor one which makes the mistake of assuming that North America was an empty wilderness just waiting for the Europeans to appear. It is certainly a complex book, as the scope and nature of its subject matter dictates. Further introductory chapters, on early European perceptions of and voyages on the Atlantic Ocean, are followed by a series of more specific treatments of many varied aspects of sixteenth-century North America. Some of these are thematic — the search for a north-west passage, the Europeans as exploiters of North America resources — while others deal with the ventures of particular European nations, or with particular regions of North America. Into the last category fall the two chapters on Newfoundland and the one chapter on "the emergence of New England and the Maritimes".

Yet the book is never disjointed. In part, this is due to Quinn's meticulous craftsmanship. Thematic chapters are strategically placed to provide bridges between specific discussions which might otherwise seem disparate. No

opportunity is lost to draw comparisons between the activities of different European groups and between their perceptions of different American areas. A further binding force is the frequent interweaving of the effects of European affairs. While such detail is never obtrusive, we are not allowed to forget that for Europe the sixteenth century was not only one of economic expansion, but also one of national and international political turmoil. The importation of European rivalries to North America which was implied by the foundation of Spanish Florida in 1565 “meant that henceforward every major initiative by Europeans in North America had a European dimension” (p. 288). Within chapters diverse source materials are skilfully synthesised. In treating Newfoundland, for example, Quinn draws upon standard works on the fishery such as those of Innis and La Morandière, upon his own previous works and those of his former student, Gillian Cell, upon a variety of manuscript sources from British archives, and upon archaeological findings in Labrador and on the Avalon peninsula. The result, as in the case of the discussion (pp. 424-8) of the colony begun by John Guy at Cupids in 1610, is a remarkable combination of detail derived from archaeological data — such as the relative locations of houses, barn, sawpit and smithy at Cupids — and broadly-based commentary on the Guy colony’s overall North American significance. It was, Quinn points out, “the second English settlement in North America to have endured” (p. 428), thus reminding us that Newfoundland at that time was very much in the mainstream of American colonisation, and at the same time uniting (by his implied comparison with the struggling colony at Jamestown and the one which had failed at Sagadahoc) three strands of the book’s intricate narrative.

The unity of Quinn’s study does not solely depend upon his mastery of the craft of writing history. More profoundly — and herein lies one of the book’s major contributions to the field — it stems from his conviction that the Europeans who ventured to the New World can and must be seen as Europeans, and not simply as representatives of particular nationalities. For students of European history, and especially for those who are familiar with such studies of European expansion as those of J.H. Parry and Immanuel Wallerstein, this is hardly an earth-shattering truth.⁸ Yet histories of North America and its regions have all too often been written as if Spanish, Portuguese, French, Dutch, English, Scots, Swedes, were all essentially different in the attitudes and practices which they brought across the Atlantic. Herbert E. Bolton protested against this assumption many years ago, but was not widely followed.⁹ In recent

8 J.H. Parry, *The Age of Reconnaissance* (London, 1963); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York, 1974). Other works on European expansion are cited by Quinn in his bibliographical essay.

9 See Herbert E. Bolton, “The Epic of Greater America”, *American Historical Review*, 38 (1932-33), pp. 448-74; also Bolton and Thomas M. Marshall, *The Colonization of North America, 1492-1783* (New York, 1920).

years, interest in comparative study of the Europeans has revived. Significantly, the trend has been given much of its force by historians of the American Indian — Wilcomb E. Washburn, Francis Jennings, Cornelius Jaenen — who have a certain detachment in their views of European colonists. In 1976, Jaenen suggested specifically that “the Bolton thesis” deserves to be explored anew.¹⁰ Quinn’s study is timely, for it examines sixteenth-century North America in just this vein.

Thus Quinn is able to shed new light on longstanding problems, and particularly on the crucial question of the relationship between colonisation and commerce. It is well known that the desire for profit and the desire to settle co-existed uneasily among Europeans of the seventeenth century who had an interest in America. But what were the origins of this tension, and was it characteristic of the sixteenth as well as the seventeenth century? Quinn’s wide perspective enables him to supply some answers. Sensibly, he observes that “the Europeans who went to North America in the period from its first discovery down to the establishment of the first permanent settlements did so, in the main, to profit themselves or their employers”. In the next sentence, though, he cautions that “exploitation for profit might take many different forms” (p. 511). Many influential Europeans were convinced that the settlement of permanent colonial communities offered the best prospects for themselves and their countries. Sir Humphrey Gilbert was one: “if an English proprietor of Newfoundland, as he regarded himself, could hold the coastline and lease out grounds in the harbours, then he could raise a considerable revenue for himself and give such preference as he felt inclined to English as against non-English fishermen” (p. 419). Other would-be colonisers, such as the London investors in Virginia, hoped to emulate the Mexican colonial exploits of the Spanish, preferably by finding mines of precious metals, but if necessary by using a combination of convict, indentured and Indian labour to produce cash crops (pp. 443-44). Yet other colonial attempts, particularly Spanish Florida, derived from a larger, imperial conception of the benefits of settlement: Florida’s initial *raison d’être* was to act as a bulwark to safeguard the Spanish monopoly of the profits of the New World (pp. 253-4). Thus, as Quinn shows, the desire for profit and the ambition to colonise were not at all incompatible in European minds, especially as the shining example of the Spanish empire provided apparent confirmation that colonies and profits went together.

But the hard realities of North America proved otherwise. The Spanish in

10 Jaenen, *Friend and Foe*, p. 9; Wilcomb E. Washburn, *The Indian in America* (New York, 1975), p. xvi; Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism and the Cant of Conquest* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1975), pp. 327-35. That the renewed interest in comparative study has not been exclusively confined to students of Indian history can be seen in the appearance of such works as K.G. Davies, *The North Atlantic World in the Seventeenth Century* (Minneapolis, 1974); and Max Savelle, *Empires to Nations: Expansion in America, 1713-1824* (Minneapolis, 1974).

Florida, the English in Virginia, north Virginia (New England) and Newfoundland, the French in Acadia and Canada: all found that it was impossible to attract large numbers of civilian settlers; that hopes of finding rich sources of precious metals were disappointed; that Indian peoples were not always inclined to play a submissive role. Above all, they found that colonisation was a difficult and expensive business, and that the immediate economic benefits derived were minimal. For a colony such as Florida, immediate returns were not crucially important. In other areas, including Newfoundland and Acadia, the case in favour of colonisation was very weak if seasonal voyagers could, as they did, reap far better rewards. Where colonial settlements were founded, they were small and in their different ways, as Quinn shows in a detailed comparative discussion (pp. 536-44), they struggled with limited success to surmount this difficulty. By 1612, the date at which Quinn's study ends, the Europeans had yet to solve the problem of the tension between colonisation and commerce. It was still entirely possible that colonisation of North America would be abandoned. As the author summarises, "by 1612, Spain, England and France had each two tender-plant settlements in North America ... [but] no one in Europe — and none of the inhabitants of those tiny settlements — could tell whether they would fade away, fail spectacularly, survive or grow" (p. 567). Quinn's book thus ends on a note of uncertainty: what would be the future relationship of Europe and North America? But his achievement has been to show us in rich detail, and with persuasive force, exactly how that uncertainty had come about.

There are of course moot points in such a large and complex book. In his discussions of Christian evangelisation, Quinn stresses that missionary activity was often regarded by European colonisers as an expedient, a kind of conquest of the mind which would render native peoples harmless and tractable. In Florida, for example, albeit after many years of frustrated endeavours by the missionaries, the Indians became "largely passive instruments of Spanish frontier policy, brought through the missions into some tangible relationship with European mores" (p. 318). What is not brought out is that the religious orders and their members were not always content to serve the turn of the colonial authorities and promoters. More attention to the quarrel between the Jesuits and Charles de Biencourt in Acadia in 1611-12 which is discussed only briefly on pp. 411-3, and without any obvious reference to the writings of Pierre Biard, might have given a different impression from that left by the example of Florida. Quinn's treatment of Acadia can be questioned also on other grounds. It is never quite as sure as his account of Newfoundland. Why, for example, is the term "the Maritimes" used in the heading of the chapter which deals with Acadia, when passages on pp. 385 and 534 show that Quinn himself knows it to be anachronistic? Did Acadia really look more "sympathetic" to Frenchmen than New England (p. 415)? Certainly Biard's description of it as "un horrible desert" does not give this impression, any more than the frequent complaints of the later Massachusetts settlers about "the wilderness" bear out Quinn's

suggestion that Englishmen felt an immediate “rapport” with New England.¹¹ Lastly, is it not a dangerous generalization to assert that the Micmac “retained their indigenous [social] system” throughout the sixteenth century (p. 102)? Had Quinn had an opportunity to read the findings of Calvin Martin, he might well have modified this conclusion. The fact remains, though, that this is a magisterial work, one that can stand up to questioning on occasional points without being belittled. It is a work of synthesis, but it is more than that. Each chapter is a work of synthesis, and all are combined with admirable skill into an overall perspective upon sixteenth-century North America which is as fresh as it is convincing.

Calvin Martin’s study, *Keepers of the Game*, is different in many ways from that of Quinn. While Quinn is concerned chiefly with the European, Martin is concerned with the Indian. Quinn’s book is long, whereas Martin’s covers 238 pages all told. Whereas the strength of Quinn’s study is that it is more than the sum of its chapters, Martin’s often reads almost as a series of articles. Indeed, Part One, “An Ecological Interpretation of European Contact with the Micmac” (pp. 27-65), had previously been published in a different form in the *William and Mary Quarterly*.¹² Yet this too is an important book. Its chief virtue does not lie in the novelty of its ecological approach, a direction already pioneered by A.G. Bailey. Nor, as ethnohistory, does *Keepers of the Game* carry or seek to carry the same kind of commanding weight as Bruce Trigger’s recent study of the Huron, *The Children of Aataentsic: A History of the Huron People to 1660* (2 vols., Montreal, 1976). Where Martin’s work does attain its real originality and depth is in focusing on one specific and crucial problem arising from Indian-European contact. We have long been aware that the aboriginal hunting and gathering economy of north-eastern Algonkian peoples was based on a limited harvesting of resources, so that stocks were conserved. We know too that this changed as the fur trade grew, with eventual disastrous results for Indian society. But why? As Martin points out (p. 16), the aboriginal hunter-gatherers in all probability had the technological capacity to put greater pressure on their natural resources than they chose to do. Thus the importation of European metal weapons, while it certainly increased the Indians’ ability to hunt excessively, does not in itself explain their willingness to do so. As Martin notes furthermore (pp. 14-5), and as Cornelius Jaenen has also shown, the evidence we have suggests that the Indian was not overwhelmingly impressed either by European trade goods or by European economic values.¹³ So the

11 Pierre Biard, *Relation de la Nouvelle France, de ses Terres, Naturel du Pais, et de ses Habitans* (Lyons, 1616), Avant-Propos.

12 Calvin Martin, “The European Impact on the Culture of a Northeastern Algonquian Tribe: An Ecological Interpretation”, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, 31 (1974), pp. 3-26.

13 Cornelius J. Jaenen, “Amerindian Views of French Culture in the Seventeenth Century”, *Canadian Historical Review*, 55 (1974), pp. 261-91.

Indian hunter did not hasten to become a crypto-European, killing large quantities of game in order to accumulate material possessions. Why, then, did his relationship with his environment change? Martin concludes, logically, that the answer must lie deep within the aboriginal society, culture and cosmology of the Indian, and he uses the Micmac and Ojibwa as case studies in his investigation.

In Martin's estimation, the early contact or "protohistoric" period — for the Micmac, the sixteenth century — has crucial significance. Before first contacts with Europeans, as Martin concludes from the observations of such early seventeenth-century writers as Biard, Champlain and Lescarbot, as well as from a large number of anthropological analyses, the Micmac hunt was limited, not by technology, nor yet by any "condescending affection for Mother Earth" (p. 20), but by the restraints imposed by the spirit world which dominated Micmac religious belief. "The world of the Micmac", Martin reminds us, "was filled with super-human forces and beings — dwarves, giants, and magicians; animals that could talk to man and had spirits akin to his own; and the magic of mystical and medicinal herbs — a cosmos where even seemingly inanimate objects possessed spirits" (p. 35). Among these spirits were the "keepers of the game" from which the book derives its title. It was incumbent upon the Micmac hunter to maintain a courteous, communicative relationship with the spirits of the game, and this in turn implied that killing would be carried out with due decency and only to fill a genuine need, whether for food, clothing, shelter, or other essential purposes. Hence the complex rituals, usually involving a speech to the intended quarry, which governed the killing and subsequent utilisation of any animal, and especially the bear (pp. 36-7). As in any close relationship, misunderstandings occasionally occurred, and it was the role of the shaman in such cases to mediate between man and the spirits (pp. 37-9). Martin stresses throughout that the prevailing ethos was not one of pale altruism, but the belief that the spirits actively supervised the hunt and would retaliate — by sending bad luck or sickness to the disrespectful hunter and his family — against any affront to their authority. Hence, needless slaughter was just plain foolish, or, as Martin puts it, "indiscreet" (p. 18).

The coming of the European caused this relationship with the spirit world to collapse, Martin goes on to argue, but not through the adoption of European values. The instrument was disease. Adopting high estimates for aboriginal population, Martin explains the relative freedom from disease of the native peoples of America through the "germ filter" of the cold climate experienced by their ancestors when migrating across the Bering Strait (pp. 48-9), and persuasively argues that the sixteenth-century Micmac experienced a large fall in population owing to European diseases contracted from visiting fishermen and traders. Using a series of medical sources, he even suggests that, contrary to the usual belief of historians, forms of plague may have been imported to North America (pp. 142-3). Martin himself admits that this is conjectural, but it would

certainly help to explain, for example, the impressive certainty of the English captain Thomas Dermer in 1619 that he had observed an epidemic of plague among Indians in New England, "for wee might perceive the sores of some that had escaped, who described the spots of such as usually die".¹⁴ Be that as it may, Martin's discussion of the overall effect of epidemics on population is convincing. For the Micmac, this caused a spiritual as well as a physical crisis. The old harmony between man and spirits had obviously disintegrated and the shaman, as healer, had proved incapable of restoring it. Martin suggests further, though this is based on Ojibwa evidence rather than Micmac, that a "conspiracy of the beasts" was perceived, since what sickness had previously been known had arisen largely from animal parasites and had been attributed in a spiritual sense to the "keepers of the game". In short, "animals were unduly punishing man with sickness" (p.146). Hence, the Micmac were already inclined, by the time the fur trade became highly organised in the late sixteenth century, to hunt to excess; Martin suggests that the motive was vengeance, that "man and animal were at war" (p. 154).

Martin's provocative thesis is debatable in the best sense. Has he gone too far in attributing motives of outright vindictiveness to Micmac hunters, when his evidence is chiefly drawn from further west and later in time? Martin himself knows that the fur trade affected different native peoples in different ways (pp. 6-7), and although his parallel between Micmac and Ojibwa is attractive and plausible, it is hardly compelling as it stands. His discussions of Micmac acceptance of Christianity can also be queried. Martin suggests that the Micmac were inclined in the seventeenth century to accept Christianity because of the European's "impressive technology and greater success at manipulating life to his advantage" (pp. 58-9). There is nothing inconsistent here: with his own spiritual world in confusion, the Indian would certainly be open to such influences as these, and Christian missionaries took great pains to stress the practical advantages of Christianity as an effective source of spiritual power and the related advantages of a European way of life. But then Martin goes on to assert that "European technology of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was largely incompatible with the spiritual beliefs of the Eastern Canadian Indians, despite the observation made above that the Micmac readily invested trading goods with spiritual power akin to that possessed by their own implements" (p. 59). The last phrase surely gives the case away. Is it not nearer the truth, and more consistent with Martin's overall argument, to see both European technology and European religion as neutral factors, initially viewed by the Indian in a sympathetic but selective manner? Only when the Indian's own self-confidence began to wane under the pressure of disease and acculturation did European technology and religion become in themselves

14 Thomas Dermer to Thomas Purchas, 1619, in Henry S. Burrage, ed., *Gorges and the Grant of the Province of Maine* (Portland, Me., 1923), p. 129.

instruments of change. It was not that they were incompatible with Indian spiritual beliefs, but rather that the way Indians later allowed themselves to be dominated by them was symptomatic of how much of that spiritual belief had been lost.

This last point raises a further question, one which is less a criticism of Martin's argument than a general problem in our present understanding of European-Indian contact. Just when and in what circumstances did Indian peoples lose their self-confidence? When did they cease to control their own culture? Obviously there is no one answer that can fit all cases. Yet the typical result of European contact was that Indian peoples ceased to be the masters of their own destiny. Martin's argument implies that this point was quickly reached, as "beleaguered victims became resigned to a life devastated by chronic disease" (p. 155). Martin has further reinforced his view in taking Robin Fisher to task for stating that the Indians of British Columbia still controlled their own culture in the late eighteenth century, despite the spiritual and physical ravages of disease. "His [Fisher's] Indians," Martin complains, "march steadfastly on, only ruffled by these experiences".¹⁵ This is an issue, though, on which we do not yet have conclusive answers. In *Keepers of the Game*, Martin's evocations of population decline, spiritual turmoil and excessive hunting are convincing in themselves. Yet even among the Micmac and among the nearby Abnaki one can find evidence of a remarkable resilience in the face of these apparent disasters. In military terms, the Micmac remained a strong and independent force well into the eighteenth century, which bespeaks a certain level of collective morale and self-reliance. Nor is there any hint of demoralisation on the part of the Abnaki chief who informed the English in 1677 that "we are owners of the country and it is wide and full of engons [Indians] and we can drive you out".¹⁶ Debate on this topic must continue, though it will undoubtedly do so enriched by Martin's study.

Keepers of the Game is a lively and provocative work. Never seeking to avoid difficult questions, it seems rather to go looking for them, as in the case of the lengthy epilogue which rebuts the notion that the American Indian had anything significantly in common with modern environmentalists. In that context, Martin stresses again that the Indian's aboriginal relationship with his environment was not one of tender concern for an idealised Nature. Instead, there was "a compact predicated on mutual esteem" (p. 187). In interpreting the breakdown of that compact among the Micmac, Martin has contributed notably to our knowledge of the early contact period. Indeed, it is rare to find two studies so

15 Calvin Martin, Review of Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890* (Vancouver, 1977), in *American Historical Review*, 83 (1978), p. 564.

16 Kennebec Sachems to Massachusetts Governor, 1 July 1677, Massachusetts Archives, vol. 30, ff. 241-2.

different as those of Martin and Quinn which are nonetheless complementary. Quinn's is lengthy, solid, self-effacing in tone, whereas Martin's ranges about voraciously and self-consciously. What they have in common is that both are vigorous, adventurous books. Both have delved courageously into a difficult period. Each has made full use of interdisciplinary techniques without compromising the author's integrity as a historian. And each has shed new light upon the sixteenth-century history of what was to become the Atlantic region. The combined force of the two books is considerable. On the Europeans, we gather much needed breadth of knowledge; on the Indians we gain depth. The result is to pose a challenge to future sixteenth-century historians of the region to undertake further explorations. There is a challenge too to seventeenth-century historians of the region to reconsider the history of the colonial period in a way that takes full account both of the hard-won European concepts which the previous century had bequeathed and of the social and cultural developments among the Indian people who still formed the majority of the permanent population. Quinn and Martin have given us two invigorating studies; they have also left us with invigorating prospects.

JOHN G. REID

Folklore Research in Atlantic Canada: An Overview

Fifty years ago, Helen Creighton was an aspiring young Nova Scotia authoress who wanted to find local color and background settings for her magazine articles and stories:

When it was suggested to me by Dr. Henry Munro, Superintendent of Education for the province, that I look for ballads in my search for literary material within this coast of adventure and romance, I thought the possibility of finding any such songs very remote indeed. . . . Yet be it said in defence that until the early summer of 1929 I had never heard a ballad sung in this my native province.¹

So began a career as a collector and popularizer of folklore that has spanned half a century. Creighton's autobiography, *A Life in Folklore* (Toronto, McGraw Hill-Ryerson, 1975), gives ample testimony to her achievements as a "pioneer" in the field of Maritime folklore. What is not made so clear is the true place of Helen Creighton in the history of North American folklore scholarship in general and of Atlantic Canada in particular.

1 Helen Creighton, *Songs and Ballads from Nova Scotia* (reprint ed., New York, 1966), p. ix. In her later writings, Creighton dates her folksong collecting as having begun in 1928, without reference to the discrepancy in dates.