

Native History in the Atlantic Region During The Colonial Period

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JUST AS WORK ON THIS ESSAY was begun, Bruce Trigger's "Alfred G. Bailey — Ethnohistorian" appeared. In it Trigger demonstrated that Bailey was in fact "North America's first identifiable ethnohistorian".¹ This recognition, however, was belated. When Bailey's *The Conflict of European and Eastern Algonkian Cultures* (St. John, 1937) first appeared, it had almost no effect on the academic community. Bailey's own thought owed much to Harold Innis from whom he had learned that Native reliance on European suppliers for highly-prized metal tools had led to over-exploitation of fur stocks and to increased warfare among competing Native groups. But Bailey did not rest with an essentially utilitarian perception of the fur trade. His other mentor had been anthropologist Thomas F. McIlwraith from whom Bailey had absorbed an appreciation of the concept of culture and a realization that without an understanding of its internal workings, it was impossible to understand the motives behind Native actions. Bailey's synthesis of economic history and cultural relativism produced a number of new insights into the interaction between the French and the Native Peoples of the Atlantic region. Nonetheless, that brilliant synthesis went largely unread until the reprinting of *The Conflict of European and Eastern Algonkian Cultures* in 1969. At that time, young Canadian ethnohistorians, like Trigger himself, found in Bailey's work the beginnings of a discipline of which American "pioneer" ethnohistorians of the 1960s were unaware.

Since 1969, ethnohistory has come a long way. As defined by Trigger in *Natives and Newcomers: Canada's "Heroic Age" Reconsidered* (Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985), it is "a set of techniques that are necessary for studying native history" (p. 166). Those techniques now include the ability to interpret not only the documentary record, but also oral tradition and archaeological evidence. In addition, the ethnohistorian needs both an understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of anthropology and the historian's sensitivity to the nuances of written records. By the 1980s, most practitioners of ethnohistory, regardless of their original professional training, had come to accept the need for such disciplinary syncretism. There was far less consensus, however, on the explanations of the reasons for Native behaviour, and even a lack of agreement on whether it is possible for Western scholars to understand

*I would like to thank Laurel Doucette, Greg Kealey, Charles Martijn and Peter Pope for their criticism of an earlier draft of this paper.

1 *Acadiensis*, XVIII, 2 (Spring 1989), p. 21.

Native cultures at all. This debate is now carried on between those whom Trigger, in "Alfred G. Bailey — Ethnohistorian", has identified as "rationalist-materialists" and those whom he has called "idealist-cultural relativists" (p. 15).

Put most crudely, rationalist-materialists tend to stress Native actions as resulting from "rational" decisions taken in response to material conditions. Early examples of this approach include scholars such as Innis and G.T. Hunt who believed that Native Peoples abandoned most elements of their traditional cultures after the acquisition of European goods. Thereafter, the motives of Native Peoples were readily understood because they differed little from those of Europeans.² Idealist-cultural relativists, of whom McIlwraith would be an example, argue that it is extremely difficult for a Western ethnohistorian to interpret Native motives. Native cultures are so different from European cultures, it is claimed, that attempts to understand Native decisions in terms of economic or "rational" motives, are futile. As Trigger has pointed out, Bailey was able to reconcile these two approaches, and most ethnohistorians since have followed the middle course that he staked out. Of late, however, a number of scholars have rejected this synthesis for an extreme form of the idealist-cultural relativist approach. Such writers, perhaps best exemplified by Calvin Martin, argue that it is impossible to write the history, in the Western sense, of a Native people.

Martin's ideas have been most recently expressed in *The American Indian and the Problem of History* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1987), in which he asked a number of ethnohistorians and others to comment on his essay, "The Metaphysics of Writing Indian-white History".³ Here, Martin sounded a familiar warning to ethnohistorians: that white scholars had failed to understand the Indian's world view for hundreds of years and were still misunderstanding it, because Indian and Western realities were radically different. "The Indian", he wrote, "was a participant-observer of Nature, whereas we in the Western cultural tradition tend to be voyeurs" (p. 28). Martin claimed that "the chief aim in life in virtually all North American Indian societies was to be saturated with the primordial Power of Nature which seemed to pulsate throughout all creation" (p. 29). By contrast, a major goal of Western culture has been to understand and therefore to dominate nature, and the chief means for reaching that goal has been rational observation and analysis. As one of many warnings against the dangers of ethnocentric bias, Martin's 1979 piece served a useful purpose, but he went much further in his introduction and epilogue to *The American Indian*,

2 H.A. Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada* (New Haven, 1930); G.T. Hunt, *The Wars of the Iroquois* (Madison, 1940).

3 Originally published in *Ethnohistory*, 26 (Spring 1979), pp. 153-9.

where he argued that, in effect, it was not possible for the rational Western historian to understand the Indian. Indians were part of a natural world that existed in space but not in history — history, that is, in the linear sense that western historians think of it. When European historians tried to interpret the Native experience by narrating a linear, analytical history, they were doomed to misunderstand it. “Historians must now”, Martin wrote, “find another language, another symbolic grid, another category, by which to render ourselves and our habitat, one that does not disfranchise and disarticulate the latter” (p. 219).

No other scholar writing about the Native history of the Atlantic region has adopted the extreme, indeed, internally contradictory, position of Martin and some of his followers.⁴ One Atlantic researcher, however, has presented the mythology of a Native group in an attempt to understand their world view. In *Stories from the Six Worlds: Micmac Legends* (Halifax, Nimbus Publishing Ltd., 1988), Ruth Whitehead has demonstrated that it is possible to achieve an understanding of Micmac mythology on its own terms, while at the same time describing and analyzing the structure of the myths. She has discerned in the narratives an overwhelming concern with the patterns of power which make up the universe. For the Micmacs these patterns “could be conscious, manifesting within the worlds by acts of *will*. They thought of such entities as Persons, with whom one could have a relationship” (p. 3). Another central theme of this body of mythology is that the world is continually changing. In Whitehead’s words: “Creation itself was fluid, in a continuous state of transformation. Reality was not rigid, set forever into form” (p. 2). Interestingly, as Whitehead implied, these concepts bear more similarity to modern quantum physics than the Newtonian reality which formerly dominated Western thinking.

Whitehead’s collection is a demonstration of Cornelius Jaenen’s assertion that “we are beginning, perhaps just beginning, to understand better the Amerindian cosmography, their myths, their values, and belief systems”.⁵ In a reasoned contribution to Martin’s volume, however, Jaenen warned that the attempt to explain Native ideology had led too many Native spokespersons and professional scholars to stress the “spiritual aspects” of Native life at the expense of “their practical and materialistic contours” (p. 65). With respect to the Atlantic region, for example, Jaenen pointed out that the over-hunting of beaver stocks was the end result of the material desires of both Natives and Europeans.

The well documented phenomenon of Native over-exploitation of animal

4 In particular see the essays in *The American Indian* by Richard Drinnon, Robin Ridington, and Gerald Vizenor.

5 Cornelius J. Jaenen, “Thoughts on early Canadian contact”, in Martin, *The American Indian*, p. 56.

stocks has also come under Calvin Martin's revisionist scrutiny. Drawing largely upon his study of Micmac participation in the fur trade, Martin advanced the startling theory in *Keepers of the Game: Indian-Animal Relationships and the Fur Trade* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978) that Indians had declared war on animals. He explained that Indians did not normally over-hunt because such a practise would cause the spirit of the animal species to retaliate by inflicting disease on the guilty parties. When Indians experienced epidemics of European disease, they blamed the spirits of animals ("keepers of the game") for having broken the covenant between humanity and animals and discarded their former inhibitions. Only later, when the northern Algonkians had developed family, as opposed to band, hunting territories, did they resurrect a "conservationist" ethic with respect to the animals they hunted.

For the most part, researchers familiar with the history of eastern Canada have vigorously rejected Martin's ideas. In "Keepers of the Game and the nature of explanation", in Shepard Krech, ed., *Indians, Animals, and the Fur Trade: A Critique of Keepers of the Game* (Athens, Ga., University of Georgia Press, 1981), Dean Snow examined how well the Martin thesis applied to the Eastern Abenaki and found a number of inconsistencies. According to Snow, Martin had misunderstood the nature of Abenaki shamanism. While it was true that the Abenaki believed that animals could cause disease, Snow wrote that "it was only those specific animals that were shamans in disguise that were the culprits, and it seems highly unlikely to me that the Eastern Abenaki would have extended their destructive rage to whole species" (p. 68). Like many other archaeologists, Snow believed that "the influence of ideology is usually short-lived, for ideology is one of the most malleable of cultural subsystems" (p. 69). He concluded that "in most cultural systems ideology functions in the service of other less elastic needs. Only rarely does ideology become a dysfunctional prime mover. While it is remotely possible that Martin has found such a rare example, the evidence seems to say that he has not" (p. 70).

Another of Martin's critics, Charles Bishop, found a serious logical error in the Martin thesis.⁶ In effect, Martin argued that the war on animals occurred because Indians had abandoned their aboriginal ideology. But, Bishop charged, the alleged attack on animals would itself have been the result of Native ideology. He also found "preposterous" (p. 44) Martin's belief that Indians first rejected or fundamentally altered their religion and then later resurrected it as a corollary of the family-based hunting territory. Much more tenable, according to Bishop, was the probability that Algonkian belief systems persisted — except in those

6 "Northeastern Indian concepts of conservation and the fur trade: a critique of Calvin Martin's thesis", in Krech, *Indians*, pp. 39-58.

cases where European missionaries were particularly successful — down to the 20th century. Bishop found a further contradiction in the fact that although Martin's thesis rested upon the supposition that serious epidemics occurred *before* Indians were intimately involved in the fur trade, there was no direct evidence that those epidemics predated the emergence of a developed fur trade. In the course of summing up the varied arguments against the Martin thesis, Trigger concluded that there was no hard evidence that any Native peoples actually believed that animal spirits inflicted disease on people for transgressing sanctions relating to hunting. Why, asked Trigger in *Natives and Newcomers*, did Indians concentrate their "war" specifically against animals whose furs were wanted by European traders?⁷

Natives and Newcomers has changed the way Canadian ethnohistorians perceive Native-European relations. Although it was concerned largely with the history of the Indians and white settlers of the St. Lawrence Valley, the observations that Trigger has made are equally true for the Atlantic region. Throughout Trigger's work there runs the premise that while Native history has its own direction and dynamics, it is understandable by Western historians. Those historians, however, have to understand and use the evidence and some of the theoretical concepts usually employed by anthropologists and archaeologists. (In fact, as Trigger noted, this multidisciplinary approach can be of equal value in understanding 16th and 17th century European colonizers whose cultures were also very different from our own.) Although the amount of written evidence about specific Native figures may not be nearly as great as that for Europeans, it is possible to write Native history by analyzing the formation and action of interest groups. If this advice were applied to the study of the Micmacs, for example, one would expect to find a difference in the historical experience of regional bands, of males and females, and even of different families. The historian, therefore, should be wary about drawing conclusions about a homogeneous group called "the Micmacs". With respect to the Europeans of New France, Trigger specifically pointed out that relations between Indians and traders were different from those between Indians and clerics, or colonial officials. Explaining actions in terms of interest groups is a technique which, according to Trigger, works as well with poorly documented European activities as it does with Native actions. In the Atlantic region, perhaps it would be well to abandon our talk of 16th century "Europeans" in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, for example, and instead speak of cod fishers as opposed to whalers, fishermen from St. Malo as opposed to those from La Rochelle, and French, as opposed to Spanish, Basques.⁸

7 Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers*, p. 243.

8 This point has been made in somewhat different form in B.G. Hoffman, *Cabot to Cartier*:

In two recent articles, Laurier Turgeon has begun this process for the poorly-documented 16th century.⁹ Although French notarial archives appear to furnish little specific information about the fur trade between French Basques and the Native people of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, Turgeon's findings have suggested that this trade — especially in the last quarter of the century — was much more important than has previously been recognized. Selma Barkham's on-going investigation of 16th century whaling in the New World has revealed relatively little documentation about the relations of the Spanish Basques with Native Peoples.¹⁰ She has, however, found indications of trade between Basques and Indians and suggests that some Indians, possibly Montagnais, might have been working for Basque whalers and codfishers. Such contact between the Basques and Native People might help to explain the emergence of a *lingua franca* based on Basque in the Gulf. Indeed, analysis of a number of historically-recorded Micmac words has led linguist Peter Bakker to conclude that a pidgin language based on the Basque tongue grew out of contacts between coastal Algonquian peoples and the Basques during the course of the 16th century.¹¹ That research has prompted Bakker to assert that "the contacts between the natives and European fishermen in general and the Basques in particular have been largely underestimated" (p. 13).

In addition to linguists, ethnologists can also provide the historian with clues to the poorly documented 16th century. In a number of recent articles George Hamell has offered some intriguing insights into the minds of the first Native peoples who encountered European traders.¹² He has argued, for example, that the Indian preference for materials that were white or translucent, and red was associated with health and well-being. Inclusion in burials of goods such as quartz crystals, red and white trade beads, and copper objects remained constant

Sources for a Historical Ethnography of Northeastern North America, 1497-1550 (Toronto, 1961), p. 213; and C.A. Martijn, "The Iroquoian Presence in the Estuary and Gulf of St. Lawrence: A Preliminary Review", paper presented to the annual meeting of the Northeastern Anthropological Association, Montreal, March, 1989.

- 9 "Pour redécouvrir notre 16e siècle: les peches à Terre-neuve d'après les archives notariales de Bordeaux", *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, 39, 4 (printemps 1986), pp. 523-49; (with E. Picot-Bermond), "Pêcheurs basques et la traite de la fourrure dans le Saint-Laurent au XVIe siècle", in B. G. Trigger, T. Morantz, and L. Dechêne, eds., *Le Castor Fait Tout: selected papers of the Fifth North American Fur Trade Conference, 1985* (Montreal, Lake St. Louis Historical Society, 1987), pp. 14-24.
- 10 "A note on the Strait of Belle Isle during the period of Basque contact with Indians and Inuit", *Etudes/Inuit/Studies*, 4, 1-2 (1980), pp. 51-8.
- 11 Peter Bakker, "Basque pidgin vocabulary in European-Algonquian trade contacts", in W. Cowan, ed., *Papers of the Nineteenth Algonquian Conference* (Ottawa, Carleton University, 1988), pp. 7-15.
- 12 "Trading in metaphors: the magic of beads", in Charles F. Hayes, ed., *Proceedings of the 1982*

for very long periods of time from the prehistoric to the early historic period, and references to the spiritual qualities of these materials were to be found even in recently collected oral accounts. The first appearances of Europeans bringing glass and metal may have been interpreted by the Micmacs as the return of a culture hero, the white rabbit man-being, from the supernatural world to the world of human beings. Although not all ethnohistorians have been willing to accept Hamell's conclusions, his arguments are internally consistent and they do accord with available evidence. They give us an unusual insight into what the Native people in the Atlantic region might have been thinking when they first caught sight of the wonder that was a European sailing vessel.

Ethnologists and linguists have not been the only social scientists contributing to our understanding of 16th century Native history. Over the past decade it has been recognized that in North America archaeology *is* Native history,¹³ particularly with reference to the period prior to the establishment of permanent European colonies in the 17th century. It is simply not possible to gauge the degree to which Native cultures changed as a result of European contact without understanding the nature of pre-contact Native culture, and archaeology has already modified some long-standing perceptions of Native history. The accounts of 17th century French observers previously led many earlier researchers to speculate that late prehistoric Native peoples in the Atlantic region followed a straightforward pattern of occupation on the coast during the warmer months in large communities followed by removal to the interior in the winter where inland game was hunted by much smaller groups. This hypothesis was first questioned by archaeologists in the early 1970s who found that three late prehistoric coastal sites in the Penobscot estuary had been occupied during the late winter and early spring rather than the summer. On the other hand, David Burley suggested that in northeastern New Brunswick the optimal strategy would have been for late prehistoric settlements to have been located for much of the year on river estuaries rather than on the coast or the interior, although he suggested that such a model would seem to fit the maximal exploitation of resources in northeastern New Brunswick, but perhaps not elsewhere.¹⁴ This caveat has been born out in

Glass Trade Bead Conference (Rochester, Rochester Museum and Science Center, 1983), pp. 5-28; "Strawberries, floating islands, and rabbit captains: mythical realities and European contact in the northeast during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 21, 4 (Winter 1986-87), pp. 72-94; "Mythical realities and European contact in the northeast during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries", *Man in the Northeast*, 33 (Spring 1987), pp. 63-87.

13 B.G. Trigger, "American archaeology as Native history, a review essay", *William and Mary Quarterly*, XL, 3 (July 1983), pp. 413-52.

14 David V. Burley, "Proto-historic ecological effects of the fur trade on Micmac culture in northeastern New Brunswick", *Ethnohistory*, 28, 3 (Summer 1981), pp. 203-16.

David Sanger's study of the faunal evidence from 12 late prehistoric sites in the Gulf of Maine. In brief, Sanger found that in some cases a winter residence on the coast has been born out, others suggest a summer occupation, and still others a year-round residence. In conclusion he warned: "That these hunter-gatherers partook of a wide range of options in a flexible fashion should serve as a caution to those who would pigeon-hole behaviour and to those of us who have, in the past, been guilty of over-simplifying a very complex record".¹⁵ Sanger's conclusions have been buttressed recently by the work of faunal analyst, Frances Stewart.¹⁶ Her examination of faunal remains from five prehistoric sites in New Brunswick and three in Nova Scotia revealed considerable variation in the seasonality of occupation including evidence for winter occupation of the coasts in southern New Brunswick and summer coastal occupation in northern Nova Scotia.

The lessons for the historian here are obvious. Participation in a fur trade may have altered the seasonal round of most or all maritime Indians, but its effects may have been different from locale to locale. Trade may have affected the Micmacs of northeastern New Brunswick, for example, differently from those of eastern Cape Breton Island. The other danger, as Sanger noted, was the "continued uncritical use of the 17th century and later documents to reconstruct pre-17th century behaviour" (p. 197). In "At the water's edge: trading in the sixteenth century"¹⁷ James Axtell made the provocative point that both Natives and Europeans believed that when they traded they were getting the best of the bargain. Indians were not aware that there were wealthy merchants and nobles in Europe who were willing to pay an extraordinary amount of money for the furs of the animals they killed. The fact that the wondrous new materials brought by the strangers from the sea could be had for such ordinary objects meant that, at least in the beginning, Indians thought that were getting the best of this exchange. Similarly, Europeans had little awareness of the complex series of events that produced the goods they exchanged for furs. A knife, as Axtell pointed out, was the end product of the work of miners, carters, smelters, and blacksmiths, although to the sea-borne trader, it was one of the "trifles" of European civilization. Axtell concluded that "Since values are always culturally relative, neither partner was wrong" (p. 161).

By now, the majority of ethnohistorians are well aware of the different cultural values possessed by 16th century Europeans and Indians. A more difficult

15 David Sanger, "Changing views of aboriginal seasonality and settlement in the Gulf of Maine", *Canadian Journal of Anthropology*, 2, 2 (Spring 1982), p. 202.

16 "Seasonal movements of Indians in Acadia as evidenced by historical documents and vertebrate faunal remains from archaeological sites", *Man in the Northeast*, 38 (Fall 1989), pp. 55-77.

17 In J. Axtell, *After Columbus: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 144-81.

problem, however, may be biological rather than cultural in nature. The role of European epidemics in reducing aboriginal populations remains a contentious and apparently intractable issue. The number of Native people north of Mexico at the time of contact may never be known with precision, but estimates of that population have risen dramatically in recent years. In 1961 a standard survey of North American Indians postulated an aboriginal population at contact of about two million.¹⁸ More recently, Henry Dobyns, arguing that European diseases were far more catastrophic than previously supposed, postulated that it was typical for Indian populations to decline to about 1/20th of their population at the time of contact over a period of about 130 years, after which they began to recover. Based on a decline of 95 per cent and a nadir of ca. 1930, Dobyns worked backward to arrive at a figure of 9.8 million Native People for North America on the eve of contact.¹⁹ By 1983, Dobyns had revised his estimates upward to 18 million for the region north of Mesoamerica.²⁰ Although not all researchers have accepted Dobyns's conclusions, all students would agree that a significant number of prehistoric societies were both more numerous and more socially and politically complex than their historical descendents. All would also agree that earlier social scientists seriously underestimated the effect of European disease upon Native societies.

Ethnohistorians of the Atlantic region in the 1980s remain divided, however, on the question of the size of aboriginal populations and the extent, timing, and effect of European epidemics. In "European contact and Indian depopulation in the Northeast: the timing of the first epidemics", *Ethnohistory*, 35, 1 (Winter 1988), pp. 15-33, Dean Snow and Kim Lanphear took issue with portions of Dobyns's argument. Dobyns had asserted that a number of 16th century epidemics which had begun in Mexico had spread throughout eastern North America. Snow and Lanphear, however, were not convinced that the very meagre existing documentary evidence could support that assumption, nor did they find any archaeological evidence for it. The authors believed that the spread of measles and smallpox would have been limited by their inability to cross "buffer zones" of low population density that existed in North America north of Mexico. In the case of bubonic plague, they did not think that the fleas carrying the pathogen could have established themselves fast enough on hosts other than black rats to cause a widespread epidemic in the interior of 16th century North America.

18 Harold E. Driver, *Indians of North America* (Chicago, 1961), p. 35.

19 "Estimating aboriginal American population: an appraisal of techniques with a new hemispheric estimate", *Current Anthropology*, 7, 4 (October 1966), pp. 395-416.

20 Henry F. Dobyns, *Their Number Became Thinned: Native American Population Dynamics in Eastern North America* (Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1983), p. 42.

Similarly, Snow and Lanphear found no convincing documentary evidence of the ship-borne transmission of epidemic disease directly to the northeast during the 16th century. While they acknowledged that this was not proof of the lack of epidemic disease, they cautioned against the construction of elaborate arguments based on the assumption of 16th century pandemics. Furthermore, the authors argued that it was unlikely that smallpox (the most common killer in the 17th century) would have been transmitted directly to the eastern coasts in the 16th century since the small fishing boat crews and the long, six week voyages would usually not have permitted the virus to survive the trip. By the 17th century, when voyages had been shortened to about a month, the likelihood of transmission was greater. Since smallpox was such a common childhood disease in Europe, it seems improbable, if theoretically possible, that an adult with the infection could somehow have become a member of a boat crew and transport the virus across the sea either in his person or in his clothing (where it could have survived longer). In Mexico it was the early arrival of colonists with children and large numbers of African slaves which insured that smallpox would be rapidly transmitted to Native populations.

In the northeast, Snow and Lanphear discovered definite evidence of an initial outbreak of smallpox in 1616, and the possibility of limited outbreaks of disease during the period 1604 to 1616. However, even the 1616 epidemic was limited to the coast. The first epidemic to affect Native People in the interior was, according to the authors, the catastrophic outbreak of 1633 which was recorded by numerous observers. Ultimately, of course, the effect on the Native people of the Atlantic region was horrific. Among the Maliseet-Passamaquoddy, for example, the mortality rate in the first half of the 17th century was 67 per cent. The difference between that century and the previous one, the authors believed, was due to the arrival of permanent settlers, with children, in the second and third decades of the 17th century. While the authors found that 17th century epidemics reduced some Native peoples of the northeast by up to 95 per cent, which agreed with Dobyns's analysis, they disagreed on the question of the timing of the outbreaks of the epidemics.

This was not the first attack upon Dobyns. Singling him out as one of the leading practioners of a group of demographic historians united in their belief both in a large pre-contact Native population and waves of 16th century pandemics, David Henige meticulously compared Dobyns's use of 16th century primary sources with the originals in "Primary source by primary source? On the role of epidemics in New World depopulation", *Ethnohistory*, 33, 3 (Summer 1986), pp. 293-312, and found that Dobyns was consistently in error. In some cases Dobyns had relied on faulty translations; in others he had used modern secondary sources that had been based on a defective interpretation of a primary source; in still others Dobyns had "omitted key phrases or...otherwise decontextualized the testimony of his sources" (p. 304). In some instances, Henige charged, Dobyns had "significantly distorted the evidence" and "in each case...advanced a

claim wholly at odds with the sources on which it purports to be based” (p. 304). Henige concluded by noting that the repeated lack of clear references to epidemic disease in the accounts of European observers of 16th century North America suggested the opposite conclusion to what Dobyns had found.²¹

While most ethnohistorians have been reluctant to accept the claims of extremely high pre-contact Native populations, at least one Maritime researcher has been convinced. Using the Dobyns formula, Virginia Miller argued that Nova Scotia Micmacs declined from a pre-contact population of 26,000 to a low, in 1843, of 1,300.²² Extrapolation to the rest of Micmac territory resulted in an estimated total Micmac population of about 50,000 on the eve of European contact. Like Dobyns, Miller referred to “the great drop which occurred in the Micmac population prior to 1600” (p. 107), but unlike Dobyns she believed that the principal cause of this decline (and that in the 17th century) was “dietary change [to European foods] resulting in reduced resistance to endemic disease, with perhaps some local incidences of European diseases taking their toll on the population” (p. 108). For a number of reasons, few researchers would agree with Miller’s estimates. First, in the light of the studies by Snow and Lanphear and Henige, estimates on the order of Miller’s are unconvincing. Second, the difficulties in determining maximum population by multiplying the lowest figure by a factor of 20 in every case seem obvious. Some of the figures for total Micmac population which Miller herself has collected vary wildly. For example, the late 19th and early 20th century totals, which ought to be more accurate than those of the 17th and 18th centuries, actually show marked fluctuation. Specifically, the Census of Canada, as cited by Miller, listed 2,076 Micmacs living in Nova Scotia in 1891, 1,542 in 1901, and 1,915 in 1911. As well, Miller’s study did not seem to take into account such problems as Micmac migration out of Nova Scotia, the difficulties in enumerating a transient population, some of whom must have been suspicious of census takers, the presence of peoples of mixed ancestry, and so forth. Indeed, Miller did not attempt to define who was a Nova Scotia Micmac, and as modern aboriginal claims researchers are aware, this can be extremely difficult. It becomes all the more crucial when a small unreliable population estimate is multiplied by 20 to form the basis of a pre-contact total.

Finally, Miller’s estimates result in a population density of 47.6 individuals per 100 km² for prehistoric Nova Scotia. This is at considerable odds with a recent

21 Readers interested in following the course of this debate are referred to replies and counter-replies by Dobyns, Henige, and Snow and Lanphear in “Commentary on Native American Demography”, *Ethnohistory*, 36, 3 (Summer 1989), pp. 285-307.

22 “The decline of Nova Scotia Micmac population, A.D. 1600 - 1850”, *Culture*, II, 3 (1982), pp. 107-20.

study by Douglas Ubelaker of aboriginal populations,²³ based on a “tribe-by-tribe” estimate of populations derived from the authors of the comprehensive, multivolume *Handbook of North American Indians* (Washington, Smithsonian Institution, 1978-1986), under the general editorship of W.C. Sturtevant.²⁴ Miller’s figures work out to two and a half times the density for the northeast as a whole (which includes many horticultural tribes) as calculated by Ubelaker, and more than twice the density that he has estimated for the predominantly horticultural southeast.

A more direct criticism of Miller’s conclusions is to be found in Dean Snow’s *The Archaeology of New England* (New York, Academic Press, 1980). Snow labelled an earlier Miller estimate of Micmac aboriginal population (one that was even lower than her 1982 total) as “essentially [an] unsupported guess” (p. 36). Both Miller and Snow accepted Father Biard’s well-known 1616 estimate of 3500 Micmacs, but Snow believed that this figure reflected a Micmac population that had suffered major population loss only within a year or so, while Miller, of course, posited considerable loss throughout the 16th century. Drawing on a detailed description of the Eastern Abenaki that resulted from the George Waymouth expedition to the Maine coast in 1605, Snow produced a population estimate of 12.3 individuals per 100 km². Assuming that the density of Micmac population would have been similar, Snow derived a pre-epidemic Micmac population of about 12,000.²⁵

Population size is intimately related to social and political organization, and a population on the order of 50,000 Micmacs would suggest a more complex socio-political organization than the band-level structures usually assumed. Anthropologists have been accustomed to placing North American Native Peoples on a continuum stretching from the band at one end, through the tribe, to the chiefdom at the other. Bands were egalitarian, family-based societies lacking full-time occupational specialists. In such a society, authority tended to be informal and based on consensus. Although sharing some of the characteristics of bands, tribes tended to be larger and were usually regulated by social groups such as clans and various kinds of societies that often linked communities

23 “North American Indian population size, A.D. 1500 to 1985”, *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, 77, 3 (November 1988), pp. 289-94.

24 Only seven of the projected 10 areal volumes had been published at the time of Ubelaker’s article, but his estimates were also derived both from the authors of tribal chapters in unpublished volumes and from Ubelaker’s own work.

25 These figures are not quite comparable since Snow envisages the Micmac country as 97,000 km² in extent, while Miller puts the Micmac range at 121,148 km². Even assuming the larger Miller territory, the total pre-epidemic Micmac population would only be about 15,000 using the Snow formula, as opposed to 50,000 using the Miller formula.

of the same tribe together. Tribes were also often characterized by the presence of certain lineages which furnished tribal leaders, although those leaders had to function by achieving general agreement rather than through the exercise of personal authority. Chiefdoms, such as those once found along the coast of British Columbia, were characterized by a higher degree of integration, the existence of social ranks and occupational specialists, the production and storage of a surplus of food and other goods, and the presence of a redistributive system in which a chief holding a specific office drew in products from the entire population, elements of which produced a variety of specialized products. This, of course, is a rather crude schema, and in reality there were many shadings and variations of socio-political organizations along this spectrum.²⁶

Nonetheless, these ideal types are useful for understanding how Native Peoples were organized. The Micmacs, as Miller pointed out, have generally been thought of as a subarctic hunting people organized in band-level societies typical of the subarctic. Citing sources largely from the 17th century, Miller believed that Micmac socio-political organization fell somewhere between that of a tribe and a chiefdom.²⁷ Not everyone would agree with this. The examples found by Miller of social ranking, of the emergence of chiefly offices, and of a division into regional districts are all from accounts dating from between 100 and 200 years after European contact. The possibility that these changes reflect the usual effects of European contact is inescapable. The fur trade led to many of these changes including a sharpening of territorial boundaries, competitive wars between ethnic groups, and a tendency for Europeans to single out certain individuals to speak for their groups. All of these trends served to increase the authority and status of individual leaders and their families. Similarly, the increase in warfare led to a consolidation of local political units into more complex forms of organization as a way to survive in an increasingly hostile milieu.²⁸

Indeed, in "Intensification and the development of cultural complexity: the northwest versus the northeast coast", in Nash, *Evolution of Maritime Cultures*, pp. 125-48, R.G. Matson found that while cultural complexity (in the form of a ranked society) was the norm in the northwest, it was lacking in the northeast. He stated:

26 Elman R. Service, *Profiles in Ethnology* (3rd ed., New York, 1978), pp. 3-8.

27 "Social and political complexity on the east coast: the Micmac case", in Ronald J. Nash, ed., *The Evolution of Maritime Cultures on the Northeast and the Northwest Coasts of America* (Vancouver, Department of Archaeology, Simon Fraser University, 1983), pp. 41-56.

28 T.J. Brassler, "Early Indian-European contacts", in B.G. Trigger, ed., *Handbook of North American Indians: Northeast*, vol. 15 (Washington, Smithsonian Institution, 1978), pp. 78-88.

While there does appear to be some complexity in terms of political organization, the highly ranked society with ownership of resources found on the Northwest coast is absent. There is little evidence of sedentariness. The summertime villages were not occupied for long and differ greatly from the Northwest Coast winter villages. The only status position that appears to have an ascribed component is that of chief. I think this is due to warfare and a reflection of a more widespread Woodland pattern...and not an important part of everyday life in Micmac society. In most other aspects, except for elaborate feasts and the summertime aggregations, the Micmac are close to the basal pattern of hunters and gatherers (p. 145).

The typical ranked society of the northwest appears, according to Matson, to result from the intensive exploitation and ownership of a reliable, superabundant resource (Pacific salmon) by specific social groups. By contrast, in the northeast there was no single, superabundant resource. Here the Atlantic salmon was far less abundant than its Pacific counterpart. And while northeastern resources may have been abundant, they were scattered and diverse, conditions which would promote a mobile rather than a sedentary settlement pattern, and would not allow any particular group to acquire ownership of a crucial food supply.

Although there is some disagreement about the magnitude of the Micmac population and the nature of its political and social organization, there is a growing consensus that Micmac activities in the Atlantic region were much more varied and extensive than previously suspected. In "Tarrentines and the introduction of European trade goods in the Gulf of Maine", *Ethnohistory*, 32, 4 (Fall 1985), pp. 327-41, Bruce Bourque and Ruth Whitehead concluded that before 1610 European goods in the Gulf of Maine had not come from direct trade with Europeans, as previously supposed, but rather from Etchemin and Tarrentine middlemen. Sometimes travelling in European shallops, these Native traders acquired European goods from white fishermen/traders in the Gulf of St. Lawrence in exchange for furs which had been collected from as far south as Massachussetts Bay. Many researchers use the terms Souriquois and Micmac interchangeably, and would argue that the Maliseets and the Passamaquoddy are the descendants of the Etchemin, but as Bourque has cautioned in "Ethnicity on the Maritime peninsula, 1600-1759", *Ethnohistory*, 36, 3 (Summer 1989), pp. 257-84, this may be a misreading of the region's history. Bourque took issue with the prevailing belief that "aboriginal populations on the Maritime peninsula were organized in river-centred tribes ancestral to the modern St. Francis, Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Maliseet and Micmac" (p. 257). Instead, he made the persuasive case that early 17th century French observers found "non-river-centred groups named Abenaki, Etchemin, and Souriquois for the same region" (p. 257). In short, he did not find it possible to trace the ancestry of modern Maritime Native Peoples directly from the groups named by early 17th century

observers, for “the modern Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, and Maliseet tribes are better understood as products of ethnic realignments, shifts in residence, territorial loss, and the Indian policies of New England and New France” (p. 274).

The fluidity of Native territories has become increasingly apparent to historians of the Native Peoples of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. In “Micmacs and Maliseets in the St. Lawrence River Valley”, Harald Prins argued that, contrary to previously accepted notions of Micmac and Maliseet tribal territories, in the 17th and 18th centuries these two groups were often found exploiting the resources of both sides of the St. Lawrence as far up river as Quebec city.²⁹ Prins, like Bourque, was critical of adherents of the “river drainage theory”, and concluded that “tribal territories changed in the course of time and that they were not necessarily coterminous with these drainages” (p. 275).

The range and variety of Micmac activity in the Atlantic region have recently been documented in *Les Micmacs et La Mer* (Montreal, Recherches amérindiennes au Québec, 1986), edited by Charles Martijn. This collection of nine articles spanned a time period from the prehistoric era to the 20th century, and focussed on Micmac use of the sea and lands of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The contributors included archaeologists, ethnohistorians, anthropologists, and a geographer. The major theme that emerges from this volume is, in the words of its editor and leading contributor, Martijn, that “Les frontières supposées de Megumgage, la patrie des Micmacs, ne restèrent pas fixes durant toute la période historique. Elles élargirent ou se ressèrent en fonction de divers facteurs environnementaux, démographiques, économiques, politiques, sociaux et religieux” (p. 221). In developing this theme, Norman Clermont outlined the maritime nature of Micmac culture, Brian Molyneaux examined the iconography of the sea in Micmac rock art, and Ingeborg Marshall described the superb canoes employed by Micmac navigators. Three essays were concerned with the previously little known Micmac use of the Magdalen Islands. Pierre Dumais and Gilles Rousseau described the islands’ environment, Moira McCaffrey outlined the surprisingly complex prehistory of the Magdelens, and Martijn analyzed the history of the Micmac presence there. In the final three chapters Olive Dickason recounted the naval war of the Micmacs against the British from 1713 to 1763, Ruth Whitehead briefly examined Micmac marine activity from Cape Breton to Massachusetts Bay in the period before 1607, and Martijn summarized Micmac occupation and use of the valley of the St. Lawrence, the Lower North Shore and the island of Newfoundland. Any student of Micmac history and prehistory should find this an extremely valuable work, and Martijn is to be commended for bringing together so much useful information in a single volume.

29 In William Cowan, ed., *Actes du Dix-Septième Congrès des Algonquistes* (Ottawa, Carleton University, 1986), pp. 263-78.

The other Native group in the Gulf of the St. Lawrence who have received a great deal of attention in recent years are the Beothuks whose tragic extinction in 1829 has been the subject of much speculation. Until the publication of Frederick Rowe's *Extinction: The Beothuks of Newfoundland* (Toronto, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1977), both the popular and the scholarly perception was that the Beothuk demise was due to a genocidal campaign by brutal white settlers. Rowe, however, argued that the Beothuks became extinct because of their vulnerability to European disease and because a growing European population prevented Beothuk access to the vital resources of the coast. He did not deny that white settlers had, on occasion, murdered Beothuks, but he did document the fact that such killings were much less frequent than earlier commentators had maintained, and he also argued that these murders were often in retaliation for Beothuk theft or destruction of essential goods. In the same year that Rowe's book appeared, Leslie Upton in "The extermination of the Beothuks of Newfoundland", *Canadian Historical Review*, LVIII, 2 (June 1977), pp. 133-53, concluded that there was nothing unusual about the rate of Beothuk decline due to disease. Assuming an aboriginal population of about 2,000, Upton found that mortality rates which prevailed elsewhere in North America would have been sufficient to ensure Beothuk extinction by the 19th century. After examining the meagre documentary descriptions of Beothuks, Ingeborg Marshall speculated that they might have suffered from smallpox and perhaps measles, but that there was stronger evidence that the Beothuks were infected with tuberculosis.³⁰ She concluded that after 1730 "diminishing food resources, close contact between bands and more frequent and extensive contacts with the white populations" (p. 73) would have aided the spread of disease. Eventually a cycle of "sickness and starvation [combined] to ensure their extinction" (p. 75).

Rowe, Upton, and Marshall all deemphasized the importance that deliberate European murders had played in the extinction of the Beothuks, but that shift in emphasis did not appear to be significant to François Raynauld, the author of "Les pêcheurs et les colons Anglais n'ont pas exterminé les Béothuks de Terre-Neuve", *Recherches Amérindiennes au Québec*, XIV, 1 (printemps 1984), pp. 45-59. According to Raynauld: "Les tentatives récentes qui consistent à mettre au pilori les colons et pêcheurs résidents pour l'extermination systématique des Béothuks (Rowe 1977, Upton 1977, Such 1978) ne trouvent de fondements concrets avant 1753 ni dans la politique anglaise, ni dans les activités économiques de la population permanente" (pp. 57-8). Arguing that political interest groups in Newfoundland had probably exaggerated the extent of the attacks against the Beothuks, Raynauld criticized previous scholars for accepting these accounts at

30 "Disease as a factor in the demise of the Beothuk Indians", *Culture*, I, 1 (1981), pp. 71-7.

face value. This is an intriguing possibility, but motivation of this sort is difficult to demonstrate conclusively. More significant, perhaps, is Raynauld's observation that previous interpretations of the Beothuk demise had in common "de représenter les Béothuks comme des êtres passifs inexorablement conduits à l'extinction" (p. 46). Raynauld also made the point that until historians, ethnologists, and archaeologists cooperated to write the history of the Beothuks during the period of contact, the real reasons for their extinction would remain unclear. Addressing Newfoundland archaeologists specifically, Raynauld speculated that the Beothuk substitution of iron for stone had likely changed their subsistence and settlement patterns in ways which were not understood. It was time, therefore, for archaeologists to set aside their concern with reconstructing the chronology of the island's prehistory and to realize "que les objets européens trouvés dans les sites béothuks méritent d'être étudiés avec la même minutie que les objets lithiques, et comme eux, d'être analysés en fonction du contexte de leur utilisation" (p. 53).

In fact, work of this nature had already begun before the appearance of the Raynauld article. Given that the sorts of Europeans who kept records about Native People — missionaries, fur traders, and Indian agents — were lacking in Newfoundland, it appeared unlikely that significant new documents pertaining to the Beothuks would be found. Although archaeological evidence about the Beothuks was minimal, the possibility of finding new sites was greater than that of finding new documents. Consequently a search for Beothuk sites was begun in 1980. The result was the location and test excavation of two new Beothuk sites in Notre Dame Bay on the island's northeast coast.³¹ Further work there revealed that the Beothuk's ancestry on the island could be clearly traced back to what archaeologists have called the Little Passage culture. The bearers of that culture had been on the island for 400 years or more before Europeans had arrived, and stylistically their tools resembled those in Labrador, a fact which prompted more than one researcher to suggest rather tentatively that the Beothuks might be related to the Montagnais.³² These Beothuk sites characteristically contained pit houses, dwellings made by excavating a pit in the ground, building a wigwam in

31 Pastore, "Preliminary Report of a Survey of Eastern Notre Dame Bay," in J.S. and C. Thomson, eds., *Archaeology in Newfoundland and Labrador, 1981* (St. John's, Historic Resources Division, Department of Culture, Recreation and Youth, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1982), pp. 152-73; Pastore, "A Preliminary Report on Investigations at Boyd's Cove-1, A Beothuk and Recent Indian Site in Notre Dame Bay, Newfoundland," in J.S. and C. Thomson, eds., *Archaeology in Newfoundland and Labrador, 1982* (St. John's, Historic Resources Division, Department of Culture, Recreation and Youth, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1983), pp. 133-60.

32 W. Fitzhugh, "Winter Cove 4 and the Point Revenge occupation of the central Labrador coast", *Arctic Anthropology*, XV, 2 (1978), pp. 146-74; Pastore, "Excavations at Boyd's Cove, Notre Dame Bay — 1983", in *Archaeology in Newfoundland and Labrador, 1983*, pp. 98-125.

it and mounding up earth around the construction. Pit houses of this nature have not been found associated with prehistoric Beothuk sites, and it is possible that these houses were one of the results of the acquisition of European goods. Iron tools, for example, permitted a more efficient hunting and housebuilding technology which might have allowed a greater degree of sedentism than had existed formerly.³³

Subsequent archaeology carried out on the island and in Labrador provided further clues about the nature of Beothuk culture. In Labrador, the existence of a feast, called a *mokoshan*, often held in a special large oval structure called a *shaputuan*, may have had a long time depth extending from perhaps 1000 years ago down to the recent present.³⁴ The feast was held to pay respect to the master of the caribou and it involved grinding the long bones of the caribou, boiling the resultant mash, skimming off the grease, pressing it into cakes, and eating them. This activity was often carried out over long hearths in structures larger than usual which could accommodate a number of participants. Archaeologically, such activities could be detected by the presence of larger than ordinary oval structures containing long hearths with considerable amounts of bone mash. The presence of at least one such structure at the late 17th/early 18th century Beothuk site at Boyd's Cove provided a rare, if tentative, glimpse into the religious life of a people whose spiritual beliefs are almost completely unknown.³⁵

Other archaeological work on the island in the 1980s also helped to place Beothuk culture in the sort of perspective that previously had been lacking. James Tuck and I, for example, have pointed out that the Beothuks were not the only Native People on the island to become extinct. Rather, the process had occurred to at least three aboriginal groups in the past, and the reason, it was hypothesized, lay in the nature of the island's interior environment. While marine resources were abundant and usually reliable, the historical record revealed that on some occasions a key resource, the harp seal, had either failed to arrive, or, because of unfavourable conditions, could not be harvested by human

33 Pastore, "Boyd's Cove — 1983", p. 107.

34 Georg Henriksen, *Hunters in the Barrrens: The Naskapi on the Edge of the White Man's World* (St. John's, Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1973), pp. 35-9; Stephen Loring, "Archaeological investigations into the nature of the late prehistoric Indian occupation in Labrador: a report on the 1984 field season" in J.S. and C. Thomson, eds., *Archaeology in Newfoundland and Labrador, 1984* (St. John's, Historic Resources Division, Department of Culture, Recreation and Youth, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1985), pp. 122-53.

35 Pastore "Excavations at Boyd's Cove, 1985—A Preliminary Report", in J.S. and C. Thomson, eds., *Archaeology in Newfoundland and Labrador, 1985* (St. John's, Historic Resources Division, Department of Culture, Recreation and Youth, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1986), pp. 218-32.

hunters. On land, the caribou and beaver were the main resources, but beaver populations were significantly lower than those on the mainland, and caribou were notorious for not always following expected migration routes. In addition, the island's barren interior lacked many of the "safety-net" species such as whitefish, porcupine, varying hare and moose (the last two were introduced to the island in the historic period) that provided alternate foods for populations on the mainland. The conclusion was inescapable that in addition to whatever hazards the Beothuks faced from invading Europeans, they also lived in an unforgiving environment which did not provide a wide margin of safety in times when traditional foods were in short supply.³⁶

In an intriguing comparison between the Micmacs who had a long history of interaction between themselves and Europeans, and the Beothuks who had at a relatively early date apparently withdrawn from European contact, Upton suggested in 1977 that the Beothuk extinction might have been due to their reluctance to maintain contact with Europeans. He was struck by the fact that the Beothuk "strategy of withdrawal has no parallel elsewhere in the region and its cause cannot be known".³⁷ Upton's identification of a crucial aspect of Beothuk history — their extraordinary withdrawal from European contact — prompted a search for the answer to the question implicit in his observation. Analysis of metal objects recovered from the Boyd's Cove site has led to an exciting conclusion. Four excavated houses from this site produced 1179 nails, of which at least 164 had been modified by the Beothuks. Most of the rest of the European goods consisted of items such as straightened fish hooks, scraps of copper kettles, and other pieces of the debris of a European migratory fishery. The only significant articles that suggested contact with other peoples were 677 blue and white trade beads. These beads may have been the result of peaceful contact, or even a brief trade, with some other group — perhaps Montagnais from Labrador. The nature of the European objects recovered from Boyd's Cove, and a smaller Beothuk site excavated in 1987, suggests that the Beothuks did not need to engage in a fur trade, as did almost every other North American Native People, because of the unusual nature of the Newfoundland economy. That economy, a migratory European fishery, provided the Beothuks with the treasured metal tools for which other Native Peoples had to trade furs. In fact, the pattern of pilfering nails, lost fish hooks, and the like from European shore stations meant that the Beothuks did not have to undergo the violence, alcohol, disease, and disruption to traditional subsistence-settlement patterns that

36 Tuck and Pastore, "A nice place to visit but...prehistoric extinctions on the island of Newfoundland", *Canadian Journal of Archaeology*, 9 (1985), 69-80.

37 Upton, "Extermination of the Beothuks", p.135.

characterized the fur trade elsewhere. While a very minor trade — perhaps one conducted in the form of “silent barter” where face-to-face contact was minimized — seems to have existed in the 16th century, it had been largely replaced in the 17th century by pilfering. Aside from possible sporadic exchanges with the Montagnais, that pattern was a viable strategy until after the middle of the 18th century when the occupation of the coastline by an expanding settled (as opposed to migratory) fishing population denied the Beothuks access to the resources of the sea. Before that time, however, sites such as Boyd’s Cove revealed a people under little stress whose production of carved bone ornaments and substantial dwellings suggested a culture that was in fact in a period of florescence rather than decline.³⁸

Although it had been suggested that the Beothuks might have had minimal trade contacts with the Montagnais, Douglas Robbins has argued in “Regards archaéologiques sur les Béothuks de Terre-neuve”, *Recherches Amérindiennes au Québec*, XIX, 2-3 (automne 1989), pp. 21-32, that the archaeological record does not indicate significant trade in the prehistoric period between the island and Labrador. Noting that European contact often had the effect of intensifying both prehistoric trade relations, and prehistoric hostilities, he pointed out that neither had apparently occurred in the case of the Beothuks and the Montagnais. According to Robbins:

on peut affirmer que s’il n’y eut qu’une interaction sporadique entre l’île de Terre-Neuve et la côte du Québec-Labrador durant la période préhistorique récente (avant 1500 AD), alors l’extinction des Béothuks terre-neuviens de la période historique s’avère un aboutissement normal. Sans partenaires commerciaux ni alliés bien établis, et sans motivation pour former une alliance avec les Blancs de l’île, les Béothuks ne pouvaient que s’éteindre devant une population blanche antipathique et envahissante (p. 32).

The question of Beothuk relations with other native groups, which previously had attracted little attention, has recently been taken up in Ingeborg Marshall’s “Beothuk and Micmac: re-examining relationships”, *Acadiensis*, 17, 2 (Spring 1988), pp. 52-82. Relying heavily upon Micmac oral traditions collected in the 19th and early 20th centuries, as well as archival and archaeological data, Marshall concluded that there was evidence for “more extensive and lasting hostilities and transgressions than have hitherto been documented” (p. 52) and argued that, after an initial period of friendliness, “the traditions agree on confrontations, and show the Micmacs emerging as the eventual victors while

38 Pastore, “Fishermen, furriers and Beothuks: the economy of extinction”, *Man in the Northeast*, 33 (1987), pp. 47-62.

the Beothuk were forced to retreat into the interior” (p. 61). Marshall believed that “Since the Beothuk were at no time aligned with the French they could well have qualified as ‘English Indians’, and no one would have stopped Micmacs from taking Beothuk scalps and bringing them to the French in Louisbourg or Quebec” (p. 64). This long-standing popular and scholarly belief was first challenged by Upton and myself on several grounds, the most important of which was the lack of any direct documentary evidence. Until such is forthcoming perhaps the best response is scepticism.³⁹

While the Marshall article placed greater emphasis on the outright hostility of the Micmacs toward the Beothuks as a partial cause of the latter’s extinction, my “The Collapse of the Beothuk World”, *Acadiensis*, 19, 1 (Fall 1989), pp. 52-71, sought to assess the extent and timing of the process by which the Beothuks eventually became confined to a fraction of their territory along the Exploits River in central Newfoundland. Drawing upon historical and archaeological evidence, I attempted to document a picture of prehistoric Beothuk use of almost the entire island of Newfoundland, as well as the Labrador side of the Strait of Belle Isle. It was suggested that this whole region supported an unknown number of bands whose interaction and exploitation of a variety of resources was gradually restricted by a number of new competitors for the region’s resources. The article concluded that although a growing English residential population might have been primarily responsible for preventing Beothuk use of vital marine resources, it was likely that Micmac occupation of the southern third of the island, the French base at Placentia, and the presence of Basques, and later Inuit, in the Strait of Belle Isle also played a role in the pre-emption of the region’s resources.

Reference to the Inuit may appear out of place in an essay on the historiography of Native People in the Atlantic region, but their presence in southern Labrador has been the subject of a considerable debate. On one side of the argument, Norman Clermont in “Les Inuit du Labrador méridional avant Cartwright”, *Etudes/Inuit/Studies*, 4, 1-2 (1980), pp. 147-66, posited the gradual populating of southern Labrador by a small Inuit population of a few hundred individuals beginning sometime in the latter half of the 16th century. This process probably began with migratory family groups who, over time, spent the entire year in the region, perhaps going as far west as Mingan on occasion. Charles Martijn in “La présence inuit sur la Côte-Nord du Golfe St-Laurent à l’époque historique”, *Etudes/Inuit/Studies*, 4, 1-2 (1980), pp. 105-26, has also suggested that during the period 1640-1690, a small permanent Inuit group may have lived on the

39 Upton, “The extermination of the Beothuks”, pp. 146-50; Pastore, *The Newfoundland Micmacs: A History of Their Traditional Life* (St. John’s, Newfoundland Historical Society, 1978), pp. 15-19.

Lower North Shore, summering in the Blanc Sablon region and wintering in the Mecatina-Natashquan area and possibly as far west as Mingan. Martijn also concluded that the toponym “esquimaux” and its variants must be interpreted with caution. In fact, he has found that it is likely that the term has been used to refer to three groups: Inuit on the Lower North Shore, a Montagnais group in the Mingan area and possibly even Micmacs from the Gaspé peninsula.⁴⁰

By contrast, J.G. Taylor was of the opinion that “the old accepted argument for an historic Inuit occupation in this area should be held in abeyance until new evidence for their existence can be produced”.⁴¹ In fact, Taylor believed that the “Esquimaux” mentioned in the earliest historical records were actually the “Shaunamunc”, a shadowy people referred to by Shanawdithit, the last of the Beothuks. In reply, Martijn pointed to an impressive amount of data demonstrating the presence of Inuit in the Strait of Belle Isle from the 16th to the 19th centuries.⁴² Here, the weight of the evidence appears to be on Martijn’s side. As he noted, there are clear references by late 17th and early 18th century French observers describing Inuit winter dwellings in the region. In the early part of the 17th century Champlain’s reference to Natives who wore sealskin clothing and travelled in skin boats seems to be a clear reference to Inuit rather than Indian peoples, and Martijn’s suggestion that a mid-16th century map depicting Native people hunting a whale was evidence of an early Inuit presence in the Strait has since received indirect support by the discovery of Inuit material from a 16th century Basque whaling station in southern Labrador.⁴³ The Martijn interpretation of the “Shaunamuncs” as a reference to the historic, and perhaps prehistoric, Montagnais also appears to fit better with what is now known about the archaeology of southern Labrador. As well, it is clear that there were Inuit in the Strait of Belle Isle as early as the 16th century; what remains to be settled is their numbers and the nature of their use of the region.

Other essays in the same issue of *Etudes/Inuit/Studies* have already answered some of the more important questions about this comparatively little-known population. For example, where Martijn found the term “esquimaux” to refer to Inuit, Micmac, and Montagnais on 17th century maps, J. Mailhot, *et al.* in “On est toujours l’Esquimau de quelqu’un” (pp. 59-76) discovered that the term had been applied to the same groups in a number of 17th century documents. In “Les

40 “The “Esquimaux” in the 17th and 18th century cartography of the Gulf of St. Lawrence: a preliminary discussion”, *Etudes/Inuit/Studies*, 4, 1-2 (1980), pp. 77-104.

41 “The Inuit of southern Quebec-Labrador: reviewing the evidence”, *ibid.*, p. 187.

42 “The Inuit of southern Quebec-Labrador: a rejoinder to J. Garth Taylor”, *ibid.*, pp. 194-8.

43 J.A. Tuck, “1984 Excavations at Red Bay, Labrador” in *Archaeology in Newfoundland and Labrador, 1984*, pp. 224-47.

relations entre les Français et les Inuit au Labrador méridional, 1660-1760” (pp. 135-45), François Trudel concluded that conflict between the Inuit and the French during the period in question occurred not because the Inuit regarded the French as allies of their “traditional enemies”, the Montagnais, but because the French concessionaires who had established sealing and trading posts on the Lower North Shore inherited a legacy of Franco-Inuit hostility. That hostility was the result of a complex of reciprocal factors involving an absence of regular trade and communication between the two peoples and Inuit theft of European goods from fishermen and concessionaires. In “Les Inuit du Labrador méridional avant Cartwright” (pp. 147-66), N. Clermont arrived at the conclusion that the Inuit of southern Labrador consisted of a real community, numbering a few hundred, which ethnographically much resembled the people from Hamilton Inlet northward with whom they maintained a variety of contacts. These contacts, however, were interrupted when the English entrepreneur, George Cartwright, established his premises at Cape Charles. The combination of severe outbreaks of smallpox and the arrival of an increasing number of European settlers, some of whom married Inuit women, resulted ultimately in the métissage and acculturation of these southern Quebec-Labrador Inuit.

Another Native group which should be considered as falling within the Atlantic region are the southern Montagnais. Until archaeology can provide a picture of 16th century Montagnais life, researchers will be forced to depend on the accounts of 17th century observers, most notably Father Paul Le Jeune, a Jesuit who lived during the winter of 1633-34 with a Montagnais band who spent that period inland from the south shore of the St. Lawrence near Quebec City. His detailed recollections of that sojourn have formed the basis for much of what we know about the Montagnais of that region and period.

In “Réflexions sur les chasseurs-cueilleurs: les Montagnais décrits par Le Jeune en 1634”, *Recherches amérindiennes au Québec*, X, 1-2 (printemps-été 1980), pp. 40-9, Jean-François Moreau determined that, despite the difficulties the Montagnais had experienced in what was probably an unusually severe winter, the Le Jeune data supported the model of a hunting-gathering people essentially in equilibrium with their environment. The late Eleanor Leacock, in “Seventeenth-century Montagnais social relations and values” also relied on Le Jeune, as well as other Jesuit commentators, to produce a description of Montagnais culture as a typical egalitarian hunting and gathering band which stressed individual autonomy and obedience to “the practical and moral order of the group” (p. 191), rather than to a specific individual.⁴⁴ Leacock also stressed that,

44 In June Helm, ed., *Handbook of North American Indians: Subarctic*, vol. 6 (Washington, Smithsonian Institution, 1981), pp. 190-5.

although superficial observers were inclined to think that Montagnais women were subordinate to men, those who had a deeper understanding of the culture realized that power was in fact shared much more equally between the sexes than in European society. Rather significantly, Leacock noted that despite the general Montagnais discouragement of the expression of anger within the group, there was a corresponding increase in social tension when bands were congregated in large numbers around missions.

Another recent researcher who has drawn heavily on the work of Le Jeune is Alain Beaulieu. His "Réduire et instruire: deux aspects de la politique missionnaire des Jésuites face aux Amérindiennes nomades (1632-1642)" traced the course of a two-pronged Jesuit programme to Christianize and "civilize" hunter-gatherer bands such as the Montagnais and the Algonkins.⁴⁵ Essentially, the missionaries hoped to accomplish this by two methods: encouraging these bands to become sedentary, and educating Montagnais and Algonkin young in the ways of the Church and European civilization. Ultimately, however, the difficulties involved in this strategy forced the Jesuits to adopt a new device, that of "les missions volantes" (p. 153) whereby missionaries would accompany Montagnais and Algonkin bands on their seasonal rounds in order to convert them and to convince them of the advantages of a European way of life. In moving beyond the *Jesuit Relations*, Daniel Castonguay, in "Les impératifs de la subsistance chez les Montagnais de la Traite de Tadoussac (1720-1750)" turned to a study of reports found in the Archives des Colonies manuscript group.⁴⁶ According to Castonguay, a decline in the moose population, one of the most significant elements of the diet of the Montagnais population in the region of Tadoussac, had a number of effects, one of which was an increase in the mortality rate of the Montagnais who participated in the Tadoussac trade. They also became more dependent upon trade goods, especially European foodstuffs, and were forced to modify their subsistence-settlement patterns in order to be able to exploit other sources of food, most notably caribou and seal — hunted respectively by the "Montagnais des terres" and the "Montagnais de la mer" (p. 27).

The number of individual works on the Native history of the Atlantic region that have appeared in the last decade is impressive; equally impressive are the corporate works of scholarship that have been published in recent years. Mention has already been made of *The Handbook of North American Indians* whose regional surveys will remain the standard for years to come. In this same league, one should also mention vol. I of the *Historical Atlas of Canada* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1987), edited by Cole Harris. This handsome

45 *Recherches Amérindiennes au Québec*, XVII, 1-2 (printemps-été 1987), pp. 139-54.

46 *Ibid.*, pp. 17-30.

volume summarizes in graphic terms much of the latest scholarship of Canada's early period. The Native Peoples of the Atlantic region are specifically addressed in Plate 20, "The Atlantic Realm", and are covered in a number of other plates dealing with Canada's prehistoric peoples. The work is a joy to use, and will be of service to teachers and scholars for years to come. Equally helpful will be J.R. Miller's *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1989). Before the publication of *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens*, the only general survey of Canadian Indian history was E. Palmer Patterson's *The Canadian Indian: A History Since 1500* (Don Mills, 1972), and a more current survey has long been needed. Miller's clear, well-organized text is based upon the latest scholarship and largely fills that need. Four initial chapters present the history of Indian-white relations to the beginning of the 19th century; the remainder of the work is concerned for the most part with developments in the west and in the nation as a whole. It is unfortunate for teachers in the Atlantic region that this emphasis results in rather less space being devoted to the Native Peoples of the Atlantic region than one might wish. The author has also chosen not to deal with Inuit-white relations, the treatment of which would have been extremely useful. Nonetheless, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens* should remain a standard for undergraduate survey courses for some time.

What is to be concluded after surveying this surprisingly large output? In fact, there are a number of generalizations that can be applied to the writing of Native history in the Atlantic region in the past decade. The most obvious, perhaps, is that the approach of the overwhelming majority of the ethnohistorians of the region is similar to that of Bailey and Trigger. Having long ago rejected the extreme rationalist-materialist view, few scholars of the region, outside of Martin, have adopted an extreme idealist-cultural relativist position. Even Hamell, whose work has stressed the importance of ideological over utilitarian motives, would not deny the ability of a Western ethnohistorian to understand those motives.

Another observation that can be made about Atlantic ethnohistory is that researchers are now much less inclined to think of Native ethnic groups as inhabiting discrete, relatively unchanging territories over centuries. Nor will scholars be able to continue to accept, without question, the notion of "tribal" peoples whose ethnic composition remained constant over long periods of time. Part of the reason for this new way of looking at the Native past results from the truly interdisciplinary character of the research. Some of the best ethnohistory, that written by Bourque, Martijn, Snow, and Trigger, for example, is being done by archaeologists. Similarly, historians such as Axtell are clearly now at home using evidence recovered by archaeologists. Most historians now recognize that early 17th century accounts of Native people were not referring to cultures unchanged since prehistoric times, but were actually describing people who had had a hundred years or more of contact with European goods if not with Europeans

themselves. It is now also rare to find any scholar writing Native history who is not familiar with anthropological concepts. The nature of egalitarian band societies, the phenomenon of revitalization movements, the integral world view of hunter-gatherers who do not make a distinction between the human domain and the rest of the world, these are now understood by historians as well as anthropologists. For their part, anthropologists are now increasingly sensitive to the context and reliability of historical documents. Historians have less and less need to complain about the tendency for anthropologists to regard all historical sources as being equal in validity, to rely on imperfect translations, and similar sins. Perhaps most importantly, all researchers engaged in the writing of Native history are concerned about the phenomenon of racism, both in themselves and in the sources they consider. Anyone in doubt of this should read a sampling of Native histories dating to 30, or even 20, years ago. There will always be room for improvement, of course, but the problem has been recognized, thanks to pioneers such as Bailey and Trigger, and it is possible to be optimistic for the future.

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A Maturing of Purpose:
Recent Publications in the History of
Technology and the Physical Sciences in Canada

IN 1899 G.M. DAWSON, Director of the Geological Survey of Canada, wrote Edwin Gilpin, Inspector of Mines for Nova Scotia, to suggest that the province not contribute machinery for the forthcoming Paris International Exhibition but restrict itself to sending mineral specimens. There would be little interest in exhibits by Canadian-owned manufacturers of mine machinery. After all, he remarked, "everything here is made on foreign patterns or by branch establishments".¹ Dawson's attitudes were typical of his time. In science many Canadians saw themselves as poor relations internationally; in engineering, Canadians borrowed happily from their British and American peers, consistently drawing upon foreign sources. Though much changed in specifics, belief in Canadian inferiority and dependency in science and technology survives today in contem-

1 George M. Dawson to Edwin Gilpin, 28 April 1899, vol. 20, RG 21, Series A, Mines and Mining Collection, Public Archives of Nova Scotia.