

Shaping a Sense of Humour: The Rise of the Written Joke in 19th-century Acadian Newspapers: 1867-87

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Shaping a Sense of Humour: The Rise of the Written Joke in 19th-Century Acadian Newspapers: 1867-87

WRITTEN JOKES HAVE NOT ATTRACTED MUCH attention from Canadian historians.¹ In contrast, scholars in other countries and disciplines have taken the topic seriously and have suggested that such jokes can provide useful insights concerning the community of readers. Even the emergence of the written joke suggests a sophisticated, literate audience with some common standards, outlooks and attitudes. Newspaper jokes reflect these outlooks and attitudes in so far as the exigencies of print often require a crisp punch-line and give none of the opportunity to gauge audience reaction that oral tradition allows. Moreover, editors must assess readers' tastes carefully, lest offended readers stop buying the newspaper.

This study examines the use of jokes by the editors of the first newspapers published for the francophones of the Maritime region to determine what insights they can provide concerning the changing nature of New Brunswick's Acadian society. The jokes considered here appeared during the time commonly known as the "Acadian renaissance". This "renaissance", or return to public life, was in progress by the mid-19th century but began to develop rapidly in the 1860s when increasing numbers of New Brunswick Acadians were taking an interest in education and the occupations and political offices open to educated men and women. The Confederation elections in New Brunswick showed the potential power of the Acadian vote and the first French-language newspaper in that province, *Le Moniteur acadien*, was founded in 1867, by an editor from Quebec, as a deliberate effort to appeal to Acadian interests. As the number of educated Acadians continued to increase, some of the priests and professionals sought to unite all Acadians, attempting to encourage the development and definition of a distinctive national identity through speeches and newspaper articles, and through National Conventions held in 1881 and 1884. However, following these National Conventions, some Acadians, dissatisfied with the *Moniteur* as the single voice for Acadian interests, founded two other French-language newspapers to serve Maritime francophones, *Le Courrier des provinces Maritimes* in 1885 and *L'Évangéline* in 1887. The foundation of these additional newspapers demonstrated the complexity of the search for national identity.

In their official speeches, Acadian priests and politicians, who comprised a very small proportion of the population, sought to articulate, and thereby entrench, the

1 For a notable exception, see James G. Snell, "Marriage Humour and its Social Functions, 1900-1939", *Atlantis*, 11 (Spring 1986), pp. 70-85.

Sheila Andrew, "Shaping a Sense of Humour. The Rise of the Written Joke in 19th-Century Acadian Newspapers: 1867-87", *Acadiensis*, XXVI, 2 (Spring 1997), pp. 59-76.

common standards and attitudes necessary to the formation of a national identity.² Yet while the editors who published such speeches were undoubtedly sympathetic to the cause, it is difficult to determine the extent to which their readers shared their views. In so far as jokes offer access to a different level of the relationship between the educated editors and their readers, they can, perhaps, provide a better measure of shared standards and values. For although the jokes may have been chosen by the newspaper editors with the intent to educate readers as well as to amuse them, to succeed in either of these missions the jokes published would have to be acceptable to many of the Acadian newspaper-buying public.³

Analysis of the jokes published in the three Acadian newspapers active in the period under review shows that, in spite of the changing and complex nature of Acadian society, some themes were constant throughout the 20 years surveyed: pretensions to superiority were mocked; the triumphs of the disadvantaged were celebrated; drunks and the foolish or naïve were laughed at; and some standards of appearance and behaviour were reinforced. However, there were also changes over time, reflecting the move towards humour more closely related to the Acadian community and to changes within that community. This was particularly evident in two areas. Jokes targeting lawyers and politicians almost disappeared as Acadian men became significant in these professions, then re-appeared as Acadians took control of their own newspapers. Jokes about women were infrequent until 1877, when they became numerous and often hostile. Yet, the number and intensity of these jokes diminished from 1883 to the end of the survey, in 1887, suggesting that the preliminary alarm over the changing status of women, which found expression in hostile humour in *Le Moniteur*, was gradually being replaced by an uneasy acceptance of their more public role and that the Acadian editors may never have found the shift as threatening as had the Quebec-born editor of *Le Moniteur*.

The findings emerging from this study of the dominant themes and changing emphasis in the jokes published in Acadian newspapers during this period of resurgence and renaissance reflect the conclusions of others who have written on the theory of humour as it applied to western countries in the 19th and early 20th centuries. They generally agree that jokes were intended to enforce community standards of behaviour, to help people cope with tensions in a society where reality never measured up to these ideal standards and to amuse by unexpected twists in

- 2 The official speeches of this very limited number of Acadian priests and politicians, and their efforts to establish a national identity have been subjected to some analysis. See for example Camille-A. Richard, "L'idéologie de la première convention acadienne", M.A. thesis, Laval University, 1960.
- 3 *Le Moniteur acadien* had 159 francophone New Brunswick subscribers in 1867, 428 in 1871 and 698 in 1881. For an explanation of how the figures were obtained and analysis of the location and social status of readers, see Sheila Andrew, *The Development of Elites in Acadian New Brunswick 1861-1881* (Montreal and Kingston, 1996), pp. 170-80. In early 1887 *Le Courrier des provinces Maritimes* had 2,800 subscribers and *L'Évangéline* had 2,732. See Gérard Beaulieu, "Les Médias en Acadie", in Jean Daigle ed. *L'Acadie des Maritimes* (Moncton, 1993), pp. 515 & 518. No breakdown by location or French or English surname is available.

word use.⁴ Nineteenth-century European and North American readers needed humour for all these reasons. Industrialization, urbanization and increased exposure to other societies and standards challenged their traditional views.

Acadian society in New Brunswick faced many of these challenges after the mid-19th century. The “renaissance” involved more than a move into politics and the professions. Industrialization brought more consumer goods within the reach of farmers and the new middle class. As opportunities for education improved and the amount of accessible fertile land diminished, many Acadians moved to urban areas to take paid employment. Some became domestic servants, urban artisans, shopkeepers and hotel or restaurant proprietors in New Brunswick. Others moved to the United States, especially to the New England mill towns.⁵ By the 1870s there were also francophone doctors, lawyers, civil servants, priests and professors in New Brunswick. Women did not enter the professions, but some became school teachers or entered religious orders and others made money in the service industries. In parish schools, colleges, convent schools and towns, Acadians were exposed to new standards of behaviour and many of the complexities of Victorian middle class life. Those who moved to the mill towns were also offered new opportunities to escape the social control of village life.

These changes and opportunities were a challenge to all Acadians facing a new way of life and jokes reflected the adaptation process. The Acadians who read the newspapers were men and women who usually had limited exposure to urban life or had come to it very recently.⁶ Readers could find guidelines in the humour, assuring them that certain standards of appearance or behaviour in this new environment were appropriate. Jokes further offered them the right to laugh at those not conforming to the “appropriate” standards. The educated male elite, including those who edited and wrote the newspapers, faced the added challenge of trying to establish or maintain some control over this changing society. Inevitably, the

4 In 1905, Sigmund Freud wrote that all jokes had a purpose. Hostile jokes were intended to gain support for certain groups or standards at the expense of others. Innocent jokes involving word play or the unexpected were to show the cleverness of the teller and obscene jokes were to express sexual excitement. *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. James Strachey ([1905] New York, 1963) p.96. Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. C. Breton and F. Rothwell (New York, 1911), re-printed in John Morreal ed., *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humour* (Albany, 1987), ch. 15, suggested jokes were particularly necessary to ease the tension associated with change in the power structure of society. Arthur Schopenhauer, “On the Theory of the Ludicrous”, in trans. R.B. Haldane and John Kemp *The World as Will and Idea* (London, 1907-9), re-printed in Morreal ed., *Philosophy*, ch. 8, thought that mocking the apparently incongruous results of such changes could lead to acceptance of them.

5 Subscription lists show that some of the Acadians in the United States bought the *Moniteur*. Analysis of their needs and numbers would be fascinating, but is outside the scope of this paper.

6 In 1871, 2.2 per cent of New Brunswick Acadians lived in communities of 5,000 or more. By 1881, the figure had risen to 17.47 per cent. The figures for communities of 3,000 to 4,999 were 16.4 per cent and 27.23 per cent. The majority of *Moniteur* subscribers were farmers within the immediate hinterland of these larger communities. See Andrew, *Development of Elites*, pp. 9 & 173.

changes created tension.

This tension is reflected in the jokes published in the French language press of the Maritimes. Acadians had a long tradition of verbal humour, but no newspaper to provide written jokes until July 1867.⁷ This first paper, the *Moniteur acadien*, published in Shediac, was followed by the *Courrier des provinces Maritimes*, published in Bathurst and *L'Évangéline*, founded in Digby, Nova Scotia. This survey covers alternate years as samples of the first 20 years of the *Moniteur*, between July 1867 and July 1887, and all issues of the *Courrier*, from its origins in August 1885 to July 1887. To broaden the sample, jokes were analysed from 1874, 1876 and 1880, when significant changes in attitudes towards women were observed, and from all issues of *L'Évangéline* for the first two months of its existence — November and December 1887 — even though the latter were outside the chosen period of 20 years of printed humour.

Changes in the choice of jokes over time and differences among the three papers under various editors show the complexity of the emerging society of literate Acadians. All the editors used jokes occasionally although the number published in any one year varied from two to 157, presumably depending on the editors' tastes and the news available. We can assume that the editors or close associates chose the jokes as the newspapers worked with a very limited staff.⁸

The choice of jokes is revealing, even though the editors themselves probably did not stop to analyse their importance. For most of the period, jokes were used to fill up columns or inserted in a section called "Faits Divers" along with minor news items ranging from visiting relatives to the birth of a two-headed calf. Starting in 1883, the *Moniteur* occasionally included a section of jokes under the heading "Juste pour rire".⁹ The editors' choices were presumably intended to amuse the majority of readers. However, the adaptation of published jokes to Acadian society was complicated by the Quebec origins of the *Moniteur's* editors. Even though the jokes they chose shared some common themes with Acadian oral tradition, they did not, apparently, draw on Acadian sources. Of course, it is possible that community members dropped in to pass on jokes, but in the entire 20 years, only one joke was given a specific local setting.¹⁰ The rest were set in France, in an unidentified francophone community or in an anglophone community (so identified by the use of English names or by reference to a specific location in the United States or England). This suggests that the editors probably reprinted jokes from the same

7 For the oral tradition, see Lauraine Léger, *Les sanctions populaire en Acadie, région de Kent* (Montréal, 1975) and Antonine Maillet, *Rabelais et les traditions populaires en Acadie* (Québec, 1971).

8 Israël Landry ran the *Moniteur* by himself. The second editor, Norbert Lussier, was helped by Ferdinand Robidoux, who took over from him in 1871, and Robidoux was helped by his own brother. Correspondents in various areas sent in local news. International news came from a telegraph service or from other papers.

9 There were no cartoons in any of the papers surveyed.

10 The only local joke was about mosquitoes in the Memramcook marshes. They were so big that they carried off a pedlar in the pot he was using to shelter from them. *Moniteur*, 19 November 1886.

newspapers they used as sources for news items. It was the custom to give free copies of newspapers to other editors and sources included French papers from Louisiana, Illinois, Paris and Quebec, and English papers from New York, Boston and Ottawa.¹¹ Presumably the editors read the jokes as well as the news and picked out those that appealed to them and that they believed might also appeal to their readers. Thus newspapers for Acadians began with borrowed humour influenced by the Quebec perspective of their early editors, and moved gradually towards humour reflecting Acadian experience.

For the purposes of analysis, the jokes have been divided into six categories: those in which the disadvantaged score over the pretentious, those in which the pretentious get put-down by circumstances, those mocking the stupid, drunk or naïve, those condemning other forms of deviant behaviour, those critiquing marriage and those playing on words. Some jokes fit into more than one of these categories. Finally, it proved necessary to include a seventh category, labelled 'other', for those that did not fit into any of the six major categories. Most of the jokes in this final category relied on an unexpected twist at the end for their impact, and several found humour in poverty. See Tables One, Two and Three.

Table One
Focus of Jokes in the *Moniteur acadien* July 1867-July 1887*

Year	Underdog scores	Put-down	Stupidity Naïveté	Deviancy	Marriage	Words	Other	Total jokes
1867	1	3	0	1	0	0	0	3
1869	1	4	2	1	0	0	1	9
1871	6	6	1	3	3	0	2	14
1873	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	5
1874	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	2
1875	0	1	5	1	1	0	0	7
1876	1	1	1	3	3	0	1	6
1877	3	5	3	7	6	5	5	39
1879	3	7	0	1	3	0	7	20
1880	5	4	2	2	4	1	6	17
1881	1	4	4	5	4	3	3	25
1883	2	7	0	5	6	0	2	11
1885	6	12	5	7	3	2	6	36
1886	8	8	3	5	6	2	5	34
1887	3	0	1	0	2	0	3	9
Total	43	67	27	34	36	14	41	228
% of all themes	16.4	25.55	10.3	13	13.7	5.3	15.6	

* In all these tables, a joke may appear in more than one category.

11 For the custom of exchanging free copies, see *Moniteur*, 27 September 1881.

Table Two
Focus of Jokes in the *Courrier des provinces Maritimes* August 1885-July 1887

Year	Underdog scores	Put-down	Stupidity Naïveté	Deviancy	Marriage	Words	Other	Total jokes
1885	6	7	3	7	5	5	9	41
1886	30	36	13	36	17	21	24	157
1887	18	17	9	12	2	6	7	62
Total	54	60	25	55	24	32	40	260
% of all themes	18.6	20.7	8.6	19	8.2	11	13.8	

Table Three
Focus of Jokes in *L'Évangéline* November-December 1887

	Underdog scores	Put-down	Stupidity Naïveté	Deviancy	Marriage	Words	Other	Total jokes
Total	4	5	8	5	3	3	8	32
% of all themes	11	13.9	22.2	13.9	8.3	8.3	22.2	

The largest number of jokes with a common theme were those that either “put down the mighty” or “exalted the humble and meek”. Throughout the period, the same people appeared and reappeared among the disadvantaged who triumphed over people in power. The “humble” were children, tramps, French peasants, Catholics (including priests), customers, waiters, servants, pupils, individuals on trial, common soldiers and those with limited education. Along with the rich and powerful, the naïve, the foolish and the drunk were also common targets throughout the 20 year period. In her study of Acadian traditions, Antonine Maillet found this was a long-standing characteristic of Acadian oral humour. The oral jokes she recorded, like the written jokes in these newspapers, poked occasionally cruel fun at the foolish and celebrated the cleverness of tricksters.¹²

Some types of behaviour or appearance considered deviant remained constant throughout the two decades of humour examined here. As Lauraine Léger has pointed out, Acadian humour traditionally reinforced a rigid code of social

¹² Indeed, in her “Introduction” to *Rabelais et les traditions populaires*, Maillet notes that several of these traditions were common in Acadian oral humour and dated from France in the time of Rabelais.

behaviour.¹³ In spite of the changes in society, elements of this oral tradition persisted. The early code of behaviour traditionally expressed in the charivari, for example, was reinforced in written jokes which mocked marriages between the old and the young.¹⁴ Older people who lied about their age or showed an “inappropriate” interest in the opposite sex were constant targets. Many of the jokes about appearance were based on the assumption that the old were unattractive: the characteristics that were mocked were often those associated with aging such as bald heads on men or bent backs and bad teeth in men or women. Those who chose not to marry were also targets; marriage was the expected norm and bachelors and spinsters were both suspect. The women were mocked as “vieilles filles”, translated as “old maids”, and it is interesting to note that, instead of being called bachelors, unmarried older men were called “vieux garçons” translated as “old boys”. This suggests a similar derogatory implication that they had failed to grow up.¹⁵ Young Parisian men who lived irresponsible lives as Parisian bohemians or idlers haunting the cafés and boulevards were also targets. Through the medium of the joke, society sought to chastise and control those who refused to take their economic responsibilities seriously. Other targets were boasters and drunks, both of whom were mocked, but with tolerant amusement.¹⁶ Those who talked too much were more harshly treated. It is easy to see how the local ‘Ancient Mariner’ could be a nuisance in the comparatively small communities of even the urbanized Acadians.

On the positive side, there were also jokes designed to facilitate adaptation to a world where urbanization was changing the power structure.¹⁷ Laughing at something seen to be incongruous did not necessarily involve condemning it or wishing to change it.¹⁸ Towards the end of this period, more aspects of Acadian society became acceptable targets. Attacks on women, which had increased at the beginning of the second decade, declined in number and intensity and there were more jokes about the problems and failures of middle class men. Combined with the appearance of more humour based on word play aimed at educated readers, this suggests that the editors were now aiming at an audience that included both men and women and expecting them to laugh at themselves as well as at others.

Some topics that were of vital importance to Acadians as they sought to find a place for themselves within the provincial power structure did not surface in jokes. This is clearly illustrated in jokes directed against authority figures. The anglophone elites of New Brunswick were never a target. As members of a

13 Léger, *Les sanctions*, esp. pp. 27-30.

14 The charivari was a traditional wedding-night demonstration forcing those whose marriages did not match community norms to acknowledge this by some form of payment to the demonstrators. See Jean-Claude Dupont, *Héritage d'Acadie* (Montreal, 1977), pp. 205-6.

15 See for example *Moniteur*, 17 February 1881.

16 Considering the strength of the temperance movement among prominent Acadians, including *Moniteur* editors Norbert Lussier and Ferdinand Robidoux, the tolerance of drunks is surprising. Andrew *Development of Elites*, pp. 82 & 190.

17 Bergson, *Laughter*, ch. 15.

18 Schopenhauer, “On the Theory of the Ludicrous”.

vulnerable minority, the francophone editors avoided direct reference to the power struggle between the anglophone and francophone politicians and priests.¹⁹ English lords and tourists appeared occasionally as the subjects of jokes about affectations or misunderstandings, but French *boulevardiers*, bohemians and boasters were more common.

Editors proved equally loath, especially in the early years, to attack their own community leaders. The Catholic Church and its priests were never targets, even though there were many disputes between lay and clerical members of Acadian elites.²⁰ Priests had helped to found the *Moniteur* and the *Courrier* and were among the subscribers of all three papers.²¹ A survey of the *Moniteur's* subscription lists up to 1881 suggests that priests also had some influence on the number of subscribers in their parishes.²² Jokes that did feature priests showed them as simple people who triumphed over the proud unbelievers.²³ Perhaps the influence of the priests also affected the moral tone, as there was only one joke about marital infidelity in the entire 20 year period.²⁴

There were very few routine jokes about other minority groups that might have been used to prop up the Acadian self-image. Irishmen sometimes appeared as the underprivileged who triumphed over the pretentious, or as the simple or the drunk

- 19 Raymond Mailhot, "La Renaissance acadienne 1864-1888, l'interprétation traditionnelle et le *Moniteur acadien*", thèse de Diplôme en Études Supérieures, Département d'histoire, Université de Montréal, 1969, p. 115 notes that paper's reliance on English advertisers. Advertisements in the other two newspapers show the same dependence. Gérard Beaulieu, "Les Médias en Acadie", in Jean Daigle ed., *L'Acadie des Maritimes: études thématiques des débuts à nos jours* (Moncton, 1993), p. 517 cites an English message in the first edition of *L'Évangéline* stating that the editor hoped to "weld together into an harmonious whole...the two constituent elements of English and French speaking peoples".
- 20 Compare Morreal, "Introduction", *Philosophy of Laughter*, pp. 3-7, who sees the chief function of 19th century humour as the relief of such tensions. There were several jokes against Protestant ministers in all three papers, so perhaps they replaced the priests as acceptable targets.
- 21 For details on the foundation and direction of the papers, see Clément Cormier, "Le Centenaire du *Moniteur acadien*", *16e Cahier la société historique acadienne*, 2 (1967), pp. 225-32; Naomi Griffiths ed., "The Founding of *Le Moniteur Acadien*", *Acadiensis*, II, 2 (Spring 1973), pp. 80-90; Phyllis LeBlanc, "Le *Courrier* des provinces Maritimes et son influence sur la société acadienne, (1885-1903)", M.A. thesis, Université de Moncton, 1978; Éloi DeGrace, "L'Évangéline à ses débuts", *Revue de la société historique Nicolas Denys*, 1, 4 (1972), pp. 96-106. One of the editors of *Le Courrier* said that the clergy had helped to finance that paper on condition that they also help to edit it. Narcisse Landry to Valentin Landry, 13 March, 1885. Cited in LeBlanc, "*Le Courrier*", p. 10.
- 22 See Sheila Andrew, "The Development of Elites in Acadian New Brunswick 1861-1881", Ph.D. thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1992, p. 298.
- 23 See for example, *Moniteur*, 26 November 1874. A priest was listening patiently to insults from unbelievers in a hotel. "How can you put up with this?" one of them asked. "Sir", said the priest, "I used to be chaplain in the insane asylum". All translations by the author.
- 24 Compare Jeanne Brunet, *Le Livre d'or de l'esprit français* (Paris, 1962) which suggests extra-marital affairs were a common theme in contemporary French humour. The joke was a mild one about a husband flirting with the maid and being firmly put-down by her. *Moniteur*, 17 June 1886.

and also featured in jokes about poverty.²⁵ This reflected the Acadian experience, as some of the New Brunswick Irish were as poor as Acadians and some Acadians had Irish servants. However, it also reflected editorial caution as many of the New Brunswick Irish had more money and power than the average Acadian. The only joke including colour referred to the convenience of not showing the soot when working on the railway.²⁶ And the only joke featuring a Jew showed a simple Jewish pedlar triumphing over a sophisticated trickster.²⁷

Nor was there any self-mockery of Acadians as a group.²⁸ As historians have noted, 19th-century Acadian nationalism was often defensive.²⁹ Even jokes aimed at modifying the behaviour of recognizable types who could be found in an Acadian community were set in France or the United States or in some unidentified place.

Although some patterns remained constant throughout the 20 years, there were also many changes, reflecting both shifts in the relationship of the editors to Acadian society and new directions within that society. The first editor of the *Moniteur*, Israël Landry, used jokes very rarely. His first joke was aimed at one of the recurring targets, its subject being a woman who did not marry. As a joke within the joke, however, she characterized all men as made of coal, gunpowder, vanity, egomania and old boots and all women as the servants of these animals. His second joke proved less ambiguous: it was a mass condemnation of painters, musicians, architects and dancers as inferior humans, superior only to the bourgeoisie. Most subscribers to the newspaper had probably never met an artist and aspired to join the bourgeoisie. His apparent willingness to offend so many categories at once perhaps helps to explain his lack of success as politician as well as editor. He gave up the paper within the year.

His successors used humour more cautiously. In 1869, editor Norbert Lussier attacked only a Protestant minister and an American professor. Ferdinand

25 For example, see *Moniteur*, 11 February 1887. A man walked into the cabin of a poor Irishman. "What do you want?" said Pat. "Nothing" said the man. "Well" said Pat "you'll find it in the jar where the whisky used to be". The few routine jokes directed against the Irish stand in contrast to the example of the anglophone New Brunswick press where Graeme Wynn found these jokes were common earlier in the century. See "Ideology, Society and State in the Maritime Colonies of British North America, 1840-1860", in R. Douglas Francis and Donald B. Smith eds., *Readings in Canadian History: Pre-Confederation*, 4th ed. (Toronto, 1994), p. 504.

26 *Moniteur*, 25 April 1882.

27 *Moniteur*, 15 November 1873.

28 Compare the use of self-deprecatory humour in Jewish society as described in Paul Lewis, "Joke and Anti-Joke: Three Jews and a Blindfold", *Journal of Popular Culture*, 21, 1 (Summer 1987), p. 60 or among nationalities dominated by the Soviet Union as discussed in "Introduction", in Chris Powell and George E.C. Paton eds., *Humour in Society, Resistance and Control* (London, 1988), p. xvi.

29 Marc Johnson, "La Presse écrite comme facteur d'identité de structuration et de la société locale acadienne : analyse du journal *L'Évangéline*", Mémoire de diplôme d'études approfondies. Université de Bordeaux III, juin, 1984, p. 90; Phyllis LeBlanc, "*Le Courrier*", p. 2.

Robidoux, also from Quebec, took over the paper in 1871. He had already served as Lussier's assistant and he soon married and became a part of community life in Shediac. Robidoux began the gradual process of adapting jokes in the *Moniteur* to suit the interests and experience of Acadian readers. Anglophone professors, and Protestant ministers were still targets, but Robidoux added French philosophers, milords, bohemians, lawyers and judges.

After 1874, the balance shifted, reflecting two changes that were results of the Acadian "renaissance". The first change was that lawyer jokes disappeared for several years, possibly in response to the growing power of the Acadians who became lawyers during the 1870s. One such was Pierre-Amand Landry, who had been elected as a member of the New Brunswick House of Assembly in 1871. By 1875, he was an important contributor to the *Moniteur* and had gained further prominence as one of the lawyers defending Acadians accused of killing a man in 'riots' opposing the withdrawal of government funds from church-run schools.³⁰ Another member of this new corps of Acadian lawyers, writer, historian and Ottawa civil servant Pascal Poirier, was also a frequent contributor to the newspaper.

The second change was a marked rise in the percentage of jokes attempting to control independent women, including jokes with elements of the bitter hostile humour emphasized by Freud.³¹ See Table Four. In 1877, the percentage of these jokes more than doubled and remained high in 1880, 1881 and 1883.³² Jokes characterizing marriage as a trap for men showed the greatest increase. Sometimes the jokes in the *Moniteur* reinforced stereotypical views about appearance, calling marriage a trap when the woman was fat or past the first blush of youth, but more often the complaints were that women were attempting to dominate decision-making. Jokes about deviant behaviour increasingly targeted nagging women. Complaints about silly women spending too much began in 1880. "L'homme est un être pensant. La femme est un être dépensant", is a typical example.³³ Jokes focussing on appearance did not increase significantly, but in 1883 and afterwards they often identified size and strength as masculine characteristics that were undesirable in women. For example, Suitor to woman with big feet: "Darling, you

30 George Stanley, "The Caraquet Riots of 1875", *Acadiensis*, II, 1 (1972), pp. 21-38.

31 Freud, *Jokes*, p. 102. The purpose of the hostile joke was to make the enemy look small, inferior, despicable or comic, to "bribe the hearer, with its yield of pleasure, into taking sides with us, without any close investigation". For other examples of the appearance of bitter humour in a time of change, see Snell, "Marriage Humour" and C.E. Hopen, "Tracking the Intractable — The Analysis of Humour in the Study of Value Systems", in A.J. Chipman and H.C. Foot eds., *It's a Funny Thing Humour* (Oxford, 1977), especially p. 320. Jane Errington, "'Woman...Is a Very Interesting Creature': Some Women's Experiences in Early Upper Canada", *Historic Kingston*, 38 (Kingston, 1990), pp. 16-35, similarly finds a repressive attitude towards women in the press of Loyalists recovering from the upheaval of their move to Canada.

32 There is no evident reason for the decline in 1879, unless business problems caused by a fire distracted Robidoux from the attack.

33 *Moniteur*, 29 July 1880. "Men think. Women spend."

have the hands of a queen and the feet of a king”.³⁴ The first joke about violence against women was published in 1877. Jokes about violence were rare, but they were savage. For example, in 1881, the *Moniteur* published the following play on words: Young woman to old lady: “What has struck you most in your long life?” Old lady: “My husband”.³⁵

Table Four
Jokes Aimed Against Women in the *Moniteur Acadien*

Year	Age or Old Maid	Looks	Marriage Trap	Deviant	Nagging Talkative	Expensive	Violence	Women as a proportion of all targets
1867	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1/3
1869	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0/9
1871	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	3/14
1873	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1/5
1874	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0/2
1875	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0/7
1876	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1/6
1877	0	0	6	3	4	1	1	15/39
1879	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	3/20
1880	1	0	0	3	1	3	0	8/17
1881	1	0	4	2	2	0	1	10/25
1883	1	1	3	0	1	2	0	8/11
1885	0	2	0	3	1	0	1	7/36
1886	1	1	5*	3	0	0	0	10/34
1887	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1/9

* Includes two mother-in-law jokes.

The purpose of such jokes appeared to be to assert male control and moral authority over women in general at a time when the power of women was seen to be increasing. The characterization of marriage as a trap designed by females was common to humour in all the countries used as sources for jokes in the *Moniteur*. Historians studying changes in the image of masculinity during this period have linked the increase in the number of such jokes to the growing emphasis on women as a moral force controlling the actions of boys at home.³⁶ The content of the

³⁴ *Moniteur*, 5 July 1883.

³⁵ *Moniteur*, 22 September 1881.

³⁶ Herbert Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 46; Peter N. Stearns, *Be a Man!: Males in Modern Society*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1990), p. 70; Anthony E. Rotundo,

Moniteur reinforces this idea, for themes in jokes were soon mirrored by advice columns emphasizing the importance of wives and mothers, as long as they observed rules established by the male writers. Outside the joke column, backlash in response to the changing role of women was illustrated by a series of articles on the duties of wives.³⁷ One article claimed that a decline in the number of marriages was not due to economic problems but to women foresaking their domestic duties to seek immoral enjoyment in activities in public places.³⁸ This series was followed by recommendations to women to avoid displays of luxury in dress and to wear honest homespun.³⁹ Education was recommended, but its purpose should be to produce appreciation of honesty and goodness and to “set limits to our needs”.⁴⁰ In other articles the female demand for luxuries was associated with the move from rural francophone areas to anglophone cities and the subsequent assimilation of Acadians.⁴¹ Advice columns urged husbands to deal gently with the manifest frailties of the fair sex.⁴²

Like the shift away from jokes against lawyers, this changing emphasis represented responses to changes in Acadian society during the “renaissance”. The convent schools of the Sisters of Charity and the *Congrégation de Notre-Dame* that had been established in the 1870s were now providing a small, but steady stream of educated “young ladies”.⁴³ These women were learning “accomplishments” and apparently acquiring expensive tastes.⁴⁴ This allowed other women to move into business to supply them, and women from other prosperous Acadian families, with fashionable clothing. The numbers of advertisements and the variety of consumer goods offered to women increased as they bought furs, parasols, gloves, hats, jewellery and gowns. Social columns now reported women, with male relatives or female companions, travelling extensively on the railways for business or pleasure. Lost and found advertisements suggested that women had considerable economic power when ladies called for the return of wallets with \$78 and \$750 in them.⁴⁵ The doctor’s wife was collecting his debts and selling property in her own name.⁴⁶ The first two women to advertise businesses did so under the protection of a husband or father, but by 1880 two Shediac merchants’ wives were buying advertisements for businesses run apart from their husbands’ stores and a Shediac woman and her

American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era (New York, 1993), p. 139.

37 *Moniteur*, March and April, 1879.

38 *Moniteur*, 6 March 1879. The writer did not specify what these ‘activities’ were.

39 *Moniteur*, 1 May 1879, 1 January 1880, 29 January 1880.

40 *Moniteur*, 1 January 1880.

41 *Moniteur*, 11 March 1880 and 20 May 1880.

42 See for example *Moniteur*, 5 July 1883 or 25 May 1882.

43 For more detailed analysis of the effects of convent education, see Sheila Andrew, “Selling Education: The Problems of Convent Schools in Acadian New Brunswick, 1858-1886”, *Canadian Catholic Historical Association Historical Studies*, 62 (1996), pp. 15-32.

44 See *Moniteur*, 8 November 1883 for a direct attack on the Quebec convent schools for producing girls unsuited to farm life who emigrated to the United States. New Brunswick convents were advised to take note.

45 *Moniteur*, 22 December 1881 and 2 March 1882.

46 *Moniteur*, 4 May 1882.

daughter were advertising their own store.⁴⁷ These were in direct competition with stores run by local men.

Women with less capital were also gaining independence. Advertisers sought women to work in the Maritime cotton mills or as domestics in the city of Saint John. Agents from New England were actively seeking female workers. Some educated girls left for Fredericton after the French Department of the Teacher's Training College was opened there in 1878 and many earned a small independent income as teachers. In Westmorland County, one of the main markets of the *Moniteur*, this brought them into direct competition with the graduates of the male college of St. Joseph.⁴⁸ There was even talk of giving women the vote.⁴⁹

By 1886, there were some modifications in the attack on women's changing roles. The *Moniteur* continued to publish a high percentage of jokes directed against women, but more of them invited women to laugh with the joke. The first inexperienced young wife joke arrived: Young wife to her maid, "Brigitte, those eggs are very small. Take them back to the farmer and ask him to let the hens sit until they grow bigger".⁵⁰ While some analysts have viewed such jokes as stereotypical put-downs,⁵¹ the advice columns suggest that a lack of first-hand experience of house-keeping may have been a recognizable problem for some women. The newspaper took advantage of this, as recipes and household hints for the new bride began to replace previous complaints that the convents were not preparing women for housework. The arrival of the mother-in-law joke in 1886 is interesting. This was standard fare in British music halls of the 1880s and Peter Stearns has argued that it represented the increasing power of female kinship networks in the urbanized Victorian household.⁵² At the same time as the mother-in-law joke arrived, jokes in the *Moniteur* began to feature women in a new role as the authority figures whose wisdom and power were challenged by the weak disadvantaged opponent. This doubtful compliment put them on a par with other emerging figures in Acadian society such as doctors, travelling salesmen, schoolteachers and professors. Acadians were comparative newcomers in all these roles and the jokes can be seen as part of an effort to come to terms with claims to authority. Those on the other side of these jokes featuring women were children, servants, tramps and beggars, while male authority figures were challenged by patients, drunks and waiters.

47 See *Moniteur*, 2 April 1869. By 1878, one of the wives was announcing the extension of her own section of the business; see *Moniteur*, 10 October 1878. *Moniteur*, 18 March 1880 published independent advertisements for stores run by women.

48 For figures, see Andrew, "Selling Education", p. 25.

49 Published letters concluded that women should be protected from the perils of voting as they were incapable of public functions and would inevitably vote for "any handsome young flatterer... Next thing you know, there will be legislation allowing them to wear pants". *Moniteur*, 30 April 1885.

50 *Moniteur*, 25 February 1886.

51 See, for example, Snell, "Marriage Humour", p. 75.

52 Stearns, *Be a Man*, p. 64. No research has apparently been done on the emergence of similar female kinship networks in Acadian New Brunswick.

The changing attitudes to women's roles were mirrored by changing attitudes with regards to appropriate definitions of masculinity. Occasional sneers at feckless "bohemians" who failed to take responsibility for their financial lives continued and the farmers' "Commandments" outlined a day of labour that was almost as unremitting as the one recommended to housewives.⁵³ However, by 1886, men were encouraged to practise gentler virtues. Fathers were berated for driving their sons from the farm by brutality and impatience when mothers' love and patience would reconcile them to home.⁵⁴ For the first time, a column in 1886 instructed young men in the niceties of modern etiquette.⁵⁵ Some compromises were apparently taking place.

The *Courrier* published several jokes directed against women in 1886, but the figures mask an even stronger change in attitude than that indicated by the shifting emphasis in the *Moniteur*. There were still jokes putting down women, including the nastiest joke of the two decades about violence.⁵⁶ However, in categories the *Moniteur* reserved for the criticism of females, the *Courrier* published almost as many jokes against men. Marriage was seen as a potential trap for both men and women. Jokes about violence in marriage featured as many women attacking their husbands as husbands hitting their wives.⁵⁷ In jokes about deviant behaviour, mean men and women replaced spendthrift wives as the primary focus. Articles on the role of women also suggested a different attitude. Where "Père Firmin" in the *Moniteur* had raged against immodesty and profligate spending, the *Courrier* published an article praising strong women who could take equal responsibility in a marriage.⁵⁸ Where the *Moniteur* recommended choosing a wife who stayed at home and avoided public places, the *Courrier* suggested that a man should take

53 *Moniteur*, 26 November 1886. For similar attitudes in Europe, see Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities*, p. 2.

54 *Moniteur*, 14 December 1886. This is an interesting reflection of the generation gap that Stearns, *Be a Man!* ch. 5, attributed to the failure of patriarchy based on property as industrialization and education provided new opportunities to the young. Janet Guildford, "Creating the Ideal Man: Middle-Class Women's Constructions of Masculinity in Nova Scotia, 1840-1880", *Acadiensis*, XXIV, 2 (Spring 1995), p. 8, found gentler virtues were a consistent part of the masculine ideal in that area and time, but emphasis on them suggested female influence.

55 *Moniteur*, 28 January 1886. See Richard Sennett, *The Fall of the Public Man* (New York, 1977), p.138, for the importance of manners to the bourgeoisie when mass production of clothing made it harder to base distinctions on clothing alone.

56 Magistrate, "Why did you beat your wife with an iron bar?" Husband "She was so used to the stick it didn't have any effect". *Courrier*, 5 August 1886.

57 For example see *Courrier*, 1 April 1886: A man went to see Dr Pasteur complaining that he had been bitten. "Was it a dog?" the doctor asked. "Much worse than that" the man replied "it was my wife". *Courrier*, 19 August 1886 and 9 September 1886 published a pun about a wife slapping her husband and a joke about Judith beheading Holofernes as an awful example to husbands.

58 "Père Firmin" wrote in *Moniteur*, March, April, May 1885. His articles suggest he wrote from Nova Scotia and, as a well-educated man with conservative views on the role of women, he may have been a priest. The contrasting article was *Courrier*, 29 September 1886.

the object of his affections out in the rain and see how she coped with that.⁵⁹ Another *Courrier* article described men and women as equal partners.⁶⁰ See Table Five.

Table Five
Jokes Aimed Against Women in the *Courrier* and *L'Évangéline*

Year	Age or Old Maid	Looks	Marriage Trap	Deviant	Nagging Talkative	Expensive	Violence	Women as a proportion of all targets
<i>Courrier</i>								
1885	1	1	4	1	0	0	0	6/41
1886	1	2	13*	3	0	1	3	23/157
1887	1	1	1	3	0	1	1	8/62
<i>L'Évangéline</i>								
1887	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2/32

* includes 4 mother-in-law jokes

The change in attitude can be attributed partly to the editors.⁶¹ Until July 1886, the *Courrier* was edited primarily by Dr Aimé-André LeBlanc and lawyer Narcisse Landry.⁶² As younger men, they may have been less cynical than Robidoux. The married editors had good reasons to treat their wives with respect. Narcisse Landry had married the daughter of a prosperous merchant with excellent political connections.⁶³ Valentine Landry, who replaced LeBlanc from September 1886 until he started his own paper, *L'Évangéline* in November 1887, was married to a teacher with a first class licence and much of the money behind *L'Évangéline* was hers.⁶⁴

59 *Courrier*, 30 December 1886

60 *Courrier*, 1 July 1886 and a similar article 6 January 1887.

61 Stearns, *Be a Man!*, pp. 110-13 argues that the fact that women were seen as business partners and equal individuals in some early-19th-century advice books was a remnant of the Enlightenment, which in some business communities lasted till the 1860s. The editors were either behind the times or ahead of them.

62 The paper was operated as a company with Valentin Landry as president, and a Quebec-born priest as vice-president. The five directors included an Acadian priest and local businessmen. LeBlanc, "*Le Courrier*", p. 10.

63 Narcisse Landry married Henriette, adopted daughter of the prosperous merchant and Conservative party supporter Fidèle Poirier of Shediac and niece of the future Senator Pascal Poirier. *Moniteur*, 8 March 1883.

64 Laurentine Chiasson, "Valentine Landry (1844-1919) patriote de la renaissance acadienne", M.A. thesis, Université de Moncton, 1974, p. 16.

However, Landry's attitude reflected more than marital prudence as he later published the letters of "Marichette", the first Acadian suffragist.⁶⁵ In the two months of *L'Évangéline* published in 1887, jokes about women were even more restrained than were those in the *Courrier*. They included one joke about a talkative woman, matched with one about a mean husband and another about the power of lasting love to overcome greed.

It is obviously risky to generalize from such limited evidence, but the differences suggest some possible interpretations. Francophones outside the Shediac area, which provided the largest market for the *Moniteur*, may have felt less threatened by the changing role of women. There were fewer businesswomen advertising in the *Courrier* than in the *Moniteur*. The only francophone women were Madame Galland of Shediac and a dress shop owner in the smaller community of Rogersville. Women also formed a higher percentage of the educated public in the northern counties. There were convent schools for francophones in Tracadie, Caraquet, St-Louis and Bathurst, but, after 1882, there was no college for men run by francophones nearer than St. Joseph in Memramcook.⁶⁶ The educated women were therefore needed to work in the schools of the northern counties and there was probably less pressure from educated men seeking the same jobs. Women also made up a higher proportion of the readers of the *Courrier* than of the *Moniteur*.⁶⁷ As a Québécois, Ferdinand Robidoux was also more aware of, and quite possibly shared, Quebec concerns about the changing role of women. Many of his articles chastising women came from the Quebec press and were not entirely appropriate for an Acadian audience. For example, in one such article women were trivialised as foolish gossips and malicious rumour mongers who should not be given access to the telephone.⁶⁸ This was unlikely to be a major issue in Acadian households in 1882. It is also possible that the Acadian editors had more experience of the value of women's work in a rural society than did Robidoux. He came from the more urban atmosphere of St.-Hyacinthe, Quebec, whereas Narcisse Landry and Valentin Landry had both spent some of their youth on a farm.⁶⁹

By 1887, the jokes about women in the *Moniteur* were even more restrained than they had been in 1886. There were very few jokes and only one directed against a woman. This change might have signalled a turning point in the social power of women that was taking place even while the jokes continued. Above all, Robidoux

65 *L'Évangéline*, various letters between 14 February 1895 and 3 February 1898. These are published in Pierre Gérin and Pierre M. Gérin, *Marichette, lettres acadiennes 1895-1898* (Sherbrooke, P.Q., 1982).

66 A few Acadian men went to the bilingual college of St. Michael in Chatham.

67 Subscriptions acknowledged in the *Courrier*, January 1886 - July 1887 showed one female for every 15 male subscribers. Acknowledgements in the *Moniteur* for the same period showed one female for every 25 males.

68 *Moniteur*, 2 March 1882.

69 Narcisse was the brother of Pierre-Amand Landry and son of Amand Landry, MHA, former teacher and farmer. Valentin was the son of Auguste, farmer and entrepreneur. See Chiasson, "Valentin Landry", p. 11. The 1881 census shows Dr Leblanc was the son of a butcher in Dorchester.

had to recognize women as customers. By 1886, they were buying advertisements for four dress shops, a restaurant, a boarding house and a hotel. The number of women independently subscribing to the newspaper was always far lower than the number of men, but they comprised an increasing proportion of subscribers.⁷⁰ And advertisers were wooing the female consumer. One advertiser, for example, explained that the best American women doctors recommended Mme Winslow's soothing syrup and, if taken seriously, Merchant O.M. Melanson's list of what every bride needed to set up house would have made his fortune.⁷¹ Moreover, women were emerging as allies in the struggle to maintain the French language. The first article reporting on a speech by a woman appeared (coincidentally we assume) on the first of April 1886. The speaker was a teacher talking about the quality of French language education.

Just as the papers adapted to changes in Acadian women's lives, they reacted to changes in the number of Acadian professionals. The *Moniteur* demonstrated its conservative leanings by its continuing respect for members of the rising Acadian elite. The jokes against men's pretensions dropped to 16 per cent in 1880 and there were few anti-lawyer jokes in the *Moniteur* during the entire period. Politicians were also a very rare target. The National Convention movement had raised Pierre-Amand Landry and Pascal Poirier to the status of icons for the *Moniteur*, and Robidoux himself had political ambitions. However, while Quebec-born Robidoux exercised restraint, the Acadians, with a new sense of pride and community born of the "renaissance", were beginning to develop the confidence to laugh at their own professionals. More Acadians entered medicine than law or the priesthood and by 1885 the main targets in all three papers were doctors. Their supposed scientific omniscience and the cost of their services were ridiculed, while their failures were the subject of black humour. The *Courrier* particularly relished jokes about doctors when Dr A.-A. LeBlanc was a contributing editor. As a lawyer and the brother of Pierre-Amand, the co-editor Narcisse Landry also felt free to make jokes about lawyers. Valentin Landry published a number of jokes against politicians. Like priests, they had been practically taboo up to this point. After he lost his job as Schools Inspector in 1886, Landry turned on politicians with an enthusiasm that none of the other editors dared to display.⁷²

From 1885, more jokes also reflected an increasingly sophisticated Acadian audience, that could appreciate word play. These jokes accounted for 11 per cent of those in the *Courrier* and 8.3 per cent of those in *L'Évangéline* for 1885-87, compared with one solitary pun in the *Moniteur* between 1867 and 1876.

70 In 1867 there were no New Brunswick Acadian females listed as subscribers to the *Moniteur*. In 1871 there was one N.B. Acadian woman for every 142 N.B. Acadian men. In 1881 the figure was one woman for every 43 men.

71 *Moniteur*, 2 November 1886.

72 See, for example, *Courrier*, 17 September 1886. A cabinet member remarks to his colleague "So X has gone to heaven. I fear we shall never meet again", or *L'Évangéline*, 28 December 1887: a man sympathized with a politician, "As a sensitive man, it must disturb you to give so much patronage to unworthy men". The politician replies that it does not bother him, he always wears gloves.

Commenting on British humour of this period Ronald Pearsall describes the growth in the number and popularity of this category of joke as the “sign of a wide-awake and alert nation that could appreciate incongruities... and assume a high level of culture”.⁷³

The francophone newspapers for New Brunswick Acadians had progressed from dependence on imported Québécois or European humour through jokes that reflected a rising panic in reaction to the changing role of women, which was scarcely surprising in a society too deferential to tease its powerful lawyers and politicians, to a more sophisticated stage. We need a comparison between the jokes published in these newspapers and those found in other contemporary newspapers before we can be sure that the changing trends identified here were indeed a reflection of changes in Acadian society, and did not, instead, reflect common trends in Canadian or North American society. We also need to know more about jokes in later editions of francophone Maritime newspapers to see how attitudes towards both women and elite men changed. However, the changes between 1867 and 1887 suggest that the Acadians were developing the confidence to accept themselves as a society that included educated and independent men and women and to laugh at some of the perceived incongruities in that society.

73 Ronald Pearsall, *Collapse of Stout Party: Victorian Wit and Humour* (London, 1975), p. 2.