



PROJECT MUSE®

The 'Conquest' of Acadia, 1710: Imperial, Colonial, and
Aboriginal Constructions (review)

Matthew C. Ward

The Scottish Historical Review, Volume 85, Number 1: No. 219, April
2006, pp. 156-158 (Review)

Published by Edinburgh University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/shr.2006.0028>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/199878>

Atlantic and even the 'green' Atlantic (a reference to the Irish, not to ecology). One can only be grateful that there is as yet no sign of a 'tartan Atlantic'.

Scotland, in fact, does not loom particularly large. It receives reasonable coverage in the essays on migration and revolution, but in several others the Scots make only a token appearance. The index contains more references to Ireland, not least because it was such an important trial-ground for English colonialism. Scotland's relatively low profile reflects the fact that for much of the period from 1500 to 1800 the majority of Scots were facing East rather than West. As Games suggests, 'In their Atlantic orientation the English were distinct from the Scots, who were precociously European in orientation' (p. 37). Of course, the Scots made up for lost time in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, though the authors of this volume were unable to benefit from the latest studies of Scottish overseas migration, such as Tom Devine's *Scotland's Empire, 1600-1815* (2003) and Marjory Harper's *Adventurers and Exiles: The Great Scottish Exodus* (2003).

Despite this, historians of Scotland will find this to be a very stimulating collection. It provides a broader framework for national histories, and succeeds admirably in its task of pushing historians towards expanded horizons.

University of Leicester

JOHN COFFEY

The 'Conquest' of Acadia, 1710: Imperial, Colonial, and Aboriginal Constructions.
By John G. Reid, Maurice Basque, Elizabeth Mancke, Barry Moody,
Geoffrey Plank and William Wicken. Pp. xxiii, 297.

ISBN 0802037550 cloth; 0802085385 paper.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 2004. £40.00 cloth; £20.00 paper.

This collection of nine essays, by six United States and Canadian scholars, examines the British conquest of the French colony of Acadia and the subsequent problems which beset the administrators of the renamed Nova Scotia. The authors take a rather post-modernist approach to the conquest, arguing that there is no 'single valid narrative' of the conquest and that 'the events that are central to this book were experienced differently by native inhabitants, Acadians, and British and French officials, and by British colonists in New England and then in Nova Scotia' (p. xi). Consequently, each chapter takes a different approach and studies a different aspect of the conquest and its legacy.

Although the work is a collection of separate essays, it does have a clear central focus, and the essays develop several central themes. In particular, the authors also place the Acadian experience in the broader context of the eighteenth-century Atlantic world and arrive at two central conclusions. As they explain, 'The first is the bankruptcy of the notion that this period in history was the "colonial" era. Colonies existed, but they existed in relationship to imperial and native worlds that interacted with each other as well as with colonial population' (p. 208). The second is that the interaction between British, Acadian and Mik'maq 'by conforming neither with the accepted pattern of a colony of settlement nor with that of a "middle ground" provides the historian with an intermediate model. Here European settlement existed and so did imperial institutions of governance. The Acadian communities, however, represented a form of settlement that had become divorced from state formation and from formal imperial expansion' (pp. 208-9).

The authors also stress the pivotal role of negotiation in shaping their model of imperialism. Central to all negotiations in the region was the weakness of the British administration in Nova Scotia. Deprived of both money and men, British administrators were unable to impose their rule on the Acadians or Native

American population. Their weakness then forced administrators to recognise the 'neutrality' of the Acadians. The Acadians in turn could not be regarded as British subjects, and Nova Scotia was therefore a colony without subjects. Lacking subjects, however, British officials struggled to establish the economic, civil and judicial framework necessary for a functioning colonial society.

To develop these themes the work is divided into four sections. The first section of the work, 'The Event,' provides the historical context for the conquest. The second section, 'Precursors,' consists of two chapters examining the antecedents of the conquest, stressing that the conquest was not a new experience for the Acadians but in many ways merely a continuation of previous events. The third section, 'Agencies,' examines the processes by which Acadia was 'conquered' and transformed into Nova Scotia. In this section Geoffrey Plank considers the limited role of New Englanders while William Wicken studies the important role of the native Mi'kmaq. Both authors emphasise the role of diplomacy and imperialism in forming early Acadia, a theme that is taken much further in the final chapter of the section by John Reid which examines the diplomatic responses to the 1710 conquest. The fourth section, 'Transitions,' explores the longer-term processes and consequences of the conquest, examining the problems faced by the British regime in Annapolis, the development of Acadian attitudes to neutrality and the imperial dimension of the conquest with its opportunities for the British to forge a multi-ethnic empire.

While scholars with an interest in Scottish history and the history of Scottish overseas ventures might be disappointed at the lack of a Scottish dimension and the absence of any discussion of Scottish involvement in early Nova Scotia, this work does appeal to a far larger audience than those interested solely in the history of Acadia and Nova Scotia. Indeed, much of the focus of the work is on demonstrating how many of the patterns in Acadia relate to the Atlantic empires of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By stressing the themes of the conquest rather than providing a narrative of the conquest, the work reveals much about the nature of the French and British/English Atlantic empires in this period. In particular, it provides a picture of communities on the edge of empire: French Acadians, Native Americans, New England fishermen and fur traders, British soldiers and administrators.

While the book is published both in hardback and paperback, the lack of a central narrative, combined with the sometimes rather theoretical approach, might diminish the appeal of the work to non-academic and undergraduate audiences. In addition, the work would also benefit greatly from a more detailed map. While it contains one map (and one contemporary plan of Port Royal), this covers a large region from Boston to Newfoundland and provides little detail of places discussed in the text.

Ultimately, the work uses Acadia as a case study to make some important conclusions about the nature of empire-building in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In particular, the work highlights several contradictions inherent in the growth of European Atlantic empires. For while the seventeenth century was a time of state formation in Europe, when the state was being more clearly defined in terms of its geographical boundaries and political consciousness, the expansion of European states into North America ran contrary to these developments, blurring state boundaries and creating nebulous political and social identities. The work also demonstrates that there were varied responses to the British invasion and that even within the Acadian community there were different interpretations, different narratives, of the conquest. Yet the idea that different Acadians in different geographic locations, or with different trading or political sympathies, should have seen events in different contexts, is hardly surprising. Nor is the discussion of Mi'kmaq responses to the conquest as complete

as might be desired, although this probably reflects the paucity of source material. However, for scholars with an interest in early American and Canadian history, or in the development of European Atlantic empires, this is an important work that provides a rich context and comparison for developments elsewhere.

University of Dundee

MATTHEW C. WARD

Patrick Ferguson: 'A Man of Some Genius'.

By M.M. Gilchrist. Pp. xii, 84.

ISBN 1 901663 74 4.

Edinburgh: NMS Enterprises. 2003. £7.99.

This is a small book, just ninety-six pages in all, with twelve black-and-white illustrations. The general editor of the series is the same person who has edited two very useful National Museums of Scotland series, 'Scots Lives' and 'Scotland's Past in Action', Iseabail MacLeod. Both series incorporate quite important little surveys, including, for example, the only general overview of the history of Scottish education that the late Don Withrington ever wrote. It is not the big book his peers expected for a professional lifetime, and which he was so well qualified to write, but it is better than nothing. This slim volume, however, is rather different in format from the other titles in the two series, because the nature of its subject enabled there to be co-operation in its publication, and one hopes in its sale, with the Royal Armouries. Their Head of Collections, Graeme Rimmer, contributes a foreword, pointing out that the Royal Armouries acquired in 2000 a particularly fine and well-documented example of the rifle with a screw-plug breech-loading mechanism that Ferguson patented in 1776, and which, though produced in such small quantities as to be an extreme rarity for collectors today, made the rifle a practical and serviceable military weapon at the time. The main trouble with small books that are inherently important is the same trouble as with small books in general: they are difficult to market. It would, however, be a great pity if the significance of this particularly important little book were to escape wider notice.

First and most obviously, it is a detailed biography, as far as the here scrupulously-surveyed surviving manuscript and printed sources permit, of a man who is most important in the history of firearms. Born in the Edinburgh of the Enlightenment in 1744, Patrick Ferguson came from a North-East family, the Fergusons of Pitfour, with strong Jacobite associations, though his father was a jurant Episcopalian who had no difficulties in accepting the Protestant Succession and swearing the oaths to the Illustrious House of Hanover. The family fortunes had been damaged in the South Sea Bubble, but Patrick's father James was a most successful advocate and, despite defending Jacobite prisoners at Carlisle in 1746, became Dean of Faculty in 1760 and a Lord of Session in 1764. There is interesting material in this biography on Patrick's close relations with his mother and three sisters, and it is clear that the sisters were far from stereotypically 'feminine' in their interests, despite being brought up in an age when the rise of sentimentality threatened to impose a singularly limited range of physical and emotional expectations upon middle- and upper-class women. Sister Jean, for example, at the age of sixteen had, according to her mother, devoted most of her energies to hunting, shooting, riding and Latin, and very little to needlework, though she enjoyed playing chess and bowls with her mother. Unless you happen to have read the foretaste of this affectionate and lively family in the brief pamphlet (justified by the family mausoleum) that