

Perspectives

“A COUNTRY AT THE END OF THE WORLD”: LIVING AND LEARNING IN NEW FRANCE, 1608–1760

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Abstract

This perspectives essay sketches how men and women of New France in the 17th and 18th centuries learned to make a living, live their lives, and express themselves under exceptionally difficult circumstances. This paper works with secondary sources, but brings new questions to old data. Among other things, the author explores how citizen learning was forbidden in 17th- and 18th-century New France, and at what historical point a critical adult education emerged. The author's narrative frame and interpretation of the sources constitute one of many legitimate forms of historical inquiry.

Résumé

Ce croquis d'essai perspective comment les hommes et les femmes de la Nouvelle-France au XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles ont appris à gagner leur vie, leur vie et s'exprimer dans des circonstances difficiles exceptionnellement. Cette usine papier avec secondaire sources, mais apporte de nouvelles questions d'anciennes données. Entre autres choses, l'auteur explore comment citoyen d'apprentissage a été interdite en Nouvelle-France XVIIe-XVIIIe siècle et à quel moment historique une critique de l'éducation des adultes est apparu. Trame narrative de l'auteur et l'interprétation des sources constituent une des nombreuses formes légitimes d'enquête historique.

Introduction

In the 1680s one intendant wrote that

Canada has always been regarded as a country at the end of the world, and as a [place of] exile that might almost pass for a sentence of civil death, and also as a refuge sought only by numerous wretches until now to escape from [the consequences of] their crimes. (cited in Moogk, 2000, p. 265)

To those tens of thousands, from a variety of humble and elegant backgrounds, who survived the ghastly 8- or 10-week journey creaking and groaning across the Atlantic, Canada might have seemed to be the end of the world. But between 1608 and 1760, before the French were defeated, a feudal society called New France gradually arose along the shores of the St. Lawrence Valley.

In this perspectives essay, I want to sketch the contours of this feudal society, called New France, as a learning society. I am interested in how the men and women of New France learned to make a living, live their lives, and express themselves under exceptionally difficult circumstances. This is a challenging task, first because most of the learning processes and pedagogical procedures were either non-formal or woven into life activities, and, second, we don't always have the records necessary to help us understand the instructional processes underpinning the work of constructing a New World society in the image of the old. This paper assumes that the contemporary discourse of the learning society (where learning is characterized as lifelong, lifewide, and learner-centred) can serve as a useful heuristic to construct the learning dynamics of all human societies, and not simply those of the modern era (with its self-conscious vocabulary of adult education). I work with secondary sources and have not done any original research into various archival sources, but I bring questions not previously addressed to these sources. I ask new questions of old data and, along the way, discover some new ways of thinking about the learning dynamics of early Canadian society. As far as I know, historians have not worked with the concept of the public sphere in the context of 17th- and 18th- century New France (particularly with my focus on the public sphere as a preeminent space for citizen learning and action-potential). Thus, it is my narrative frame and learning optic that shapes the way various secondary sources are used. This, I argue, is one of many legitimate ways of engaging in historical inquiry.

A Feudal Fragment in the New World

Roberta Hamilton (1988) argues that New France was "part of a feudal society of the Ancien Régime, and not, as most would have it, simply a pale imitation . . ." (p. 19). Indeed, it would have been unusual for those steeped in the tradition of lordly domination and kingly prerogative to invent something completely new. The central learning challenge faced by the elites in the metropolis was how to recreate feudal conditions in the New World to ensure the flow of goods into the imperial centre. This educative task demanded incredible financial resources and enormous energy to lure men and women from one world and transform them into habitants of another. To both get them and keep them, certain conventional feudal mechanisms were loosened, particularly in the early days of

clearing the land. But the form of governance, the organization of the seigneuries, the plight of the habitants, the basic form of apprenticeship, the privileged moral role of the Roman Catholic Church, and the outlook of the merchants did not break radically with feudal notions of how society ought to be organized.

Before the first wheat fields started waving in the winds off the St. Lawrence on the Island of Montreal, the fur trade had been in full swing for 100 years. Early modern Europe was mad for furs. New France was organized as a colonial outpost to ensure that this “brown gold” flowed into the old country. Beginning initially as an offshoot of the fishery, the fur trade gained so much momentum that by the 1590s, the French Crown wanted to ensure its control against its chief competitor, the English. The iconic explorer and soldier, Samuel de Champlain, of whom little is known, founded Quebec (Algonquian for “narrow passage”) in 1608 to control access to the interior. By 1627, France had granted the infamous Company of One Hundred Associates all of North American land not claimed by a Christian prince. This presumptuous move was tolerated by the First Nations peoples only because the Algonquians were at war with the Iroquois. Forming an alliance with the French was in their interest—but it would turn out to be a bargain with the devil.

This alliance between French and First Nations, forcing each into the other’s arms, created our first example of intercultural learning in Canadian history. Indians had helped Cartier’s scurvy-ridden men cure themselves with white cedar. Natives taught the French how to survive the winter. They supplied them with valuable geographical information. The French learned the value of birchbark canoes, toboggans, and snowshoes. They learned how to make maple sugar and collect berries. When the habitants began their farming, they soon planted seeds (pumpkins, squash, corn) gathered from Indians. Champlain and the Indians also exchanged people. The famed *coureur de bois*, Étienne Brûlé, and his native counterpart, Savignon, lived with the other culture for a time. This form of intercultural transmission was conducted informally, but it was an important learning exchange. Yet this communicative learning was asymmetrical, framed within the French imperial project of domination (Cook, 1993; Francis, Jones, & Smith, 2002; Jaenen, 1973).

The fur trade required the labour of aboriginal primary producers, canoemen, and traders. Each of these categories had to acquire the knowledge, skills, sensibility, and attitudes appropriate to their tasks. They were cogs in an economic system that extended far beyond their local environments. The Indians drew upon their intimate understanding of hunting and gathering (interpreting the signs of wind and smell and woods) to trap the beaver and other fur-bearing animals. Harnessed to a global system, their knowledge and skill gradually transformed them into trappers who were dependent on foreign goods for sustenance. This was probably not what they had bargained for. Some ended up demoralized, perhaps even traumatized, drifting in and around settlements like Montreal (Miller, 1989).

The *coureur de bois*, the voyageurs, are romantic figures in Canadian history and an interpretive challenge for social historians. What, exactly, drew them into this extremely dangerous form of work? Nobody quite knows for certain. They were largely recruited from the colony’s farm population (Dechene [1992] says that a quarter of the local men from Montreal participated in the trade, and 54% from Trois-Rivières [p. 118]). The farms didn’t allow them to earn enough to support their families. They could also escape from

the disciplinary restraints and social suffocation of life in a rudimentary society. These men were highly skilled. It helped if they were numerate and literate.

Usually, a canoe brigade was led by a leader who served as mentor for the others (between 1700 and 1750, canoes expanded from three- to eight-man crews). Pentland (1981) describes the process:

At the head was the conductor (originally the trader). Engages were placed in the canoes and paid according to their skill, an arrangement that provided both a status system and a training program. The isolation, the risks, the semi-military nature of organization, facilitated dependence on the leader and development of *esprit de corps*. The nature of the mature extended trade put a premium on paternalistic labour techniques in every respect. (p. 29)

As one Jesuit reported, "the sort of person who thought nothing of covering five to six hundred leagues by canoe, paddle in hand, or of living off corn and bear fat for twelve to eighteen months, or of sleeping in bark or branch cabins" was suited for the wilderness (cited in Dechene, 1992, p. 122). They carried bundles up to 200 pounds, portaged up riverbanks and along dried-out riverbeds, fought the tortuous mosquitoes with bear grease, survived the rapids, endured isolation for months on end, and, last but not least, chose suitable companions. W. J. Eccles (1969) opens a small window onto their world:

Squatting on a narrow thwart, legs cramped by bales of goods or furs, these men paddled hour after hour from dawn to dusk, pausing occasionally for a pipe while the professional raconteur spun a tale from his inexhaustible supply, singing folk songs to the dip of the paddle, forty-five or forty-eight strokes to the minute. (pp. 110–111)

Their bodies were their preeminent learning sites. Mind and muscle were attuned to extraordinary contingencies and unpredictable problems.

Nothing is known about how their psyches were educated for this work. But they must have had to learn to stave off madness. They may have accomplished this self-educative task by turning voyaging into a kin-related affair. They built social capital through their family networks. The *coureur de bois* may, perhaps, be one of our first Canadian examples of an outcast pedagogy. Theirs was a pedagogy of daring and danger, learned experientially in the face of death, a world far removed from the relative safety and moral surveillance of the Catholic "garrison culture" emerging reluctantly in the Canadian wilderness.

The Creation of the Habitant

The seigneurial system implanted in the St. Lawrence Valley in the 17th and 18th centuries required the peasantry to give over surpluses to the seigneurs and the church. The colonists were also required to tithe; the *corvée* was also used. The transformation of immigrants to the New World into habitants occurred within the legal framework, legitimated by the Royal Crown, of seigneurial ownership of land. The famous strip farms, now an indelible part of the Canadian historical imagination, were imposed upon the geography and landscape of New France. Those who ended up clearing and gaining a living from these lands had some

leeway, certainly, but were essentially bound to a legal system that extracted surplus from their labour.

Throughout the 17th century, the fur trade was the focus of economic activity in New France. But the Company of One Hundred Associates had little success attracting any significant population. Only when Louis XIV decided to rule Canada directly in 1663 would New France gain a “sizable European population, a rural and agrarian minority, and a social order resembling that of the mother country, erected on the site staked out earlier by the fur traders” (Greer, 1985, p. 4). The establishment of the seigneurial system shaped agricultural practices (and political conflict) well into the mid-19th century. This system created farms allowing for maximum access to the rivers. Goods and news travelled along the shores.

Army officers, clergy (the Sulpicians controlled Montreal), minor aristocrats, and others became seigneurs, but they had to “clear the grants and make them productive” (Greer, 1985, p. 4). They could subdivide the land and grant portions to *censitaires* (who could clear and cultivate their portion and pay rent). To protect the colony, seigneuries were often granted to army officers with the hope that their men would stay on as militia-farmers. The 17th-century seigneuries also served other functions. They were required to provide “custom and care for the ‘humble folk’” (Greer, p. 12). After 1763, the British had a difficult time adjusting to this system. They preferred landlords and tenants. The seigneurial system was abolished in 1854.

One of the main learning challenges facing the farmers of New France—most of whom were of urban and non-agricultural backgrounds—was to transform themselves from Frenchmen into peasants (Choquette, 1997). By the early 18th century, the Indian wars with the Iroquois had ceased. The early back-breaking work of clearing the land of trees and removing the stumps had been completed. At mid-century, agriculture was now the

chief pursuit of almost all the inhabitants of the area; the original craftsmen and army veterans-turned-settlers had been replaced by a new generation of Canadian born peasants for whom hunting, fur trading, and smuggling were at most marginal activities. A European rural society had emerged on this corner of the New World and it was one whose life centred on the self-sufficient peasant household. (Greer, 1985, p. 19)

For the habitant, the family household was the preeminent learning site. Wage labour was not yet important to the household. Work was primarily an affair of the entire family, with children not yet having an identity apart from the multifunctional household. The households were largely enclosed and self-contained, with a few communities (Sorel and Saint-Ours) having pasture in common. A glance inside a typical rural household in mid-18th-century New France provides insight into how they worked and what they had to know, be, and do. Theophile Allaire was head of his household in Saint-Ours. He was born in 1722, 12th of 15 children, into the crowded community of Île d’Orléans. He moved west with his family when he was only 3, settling in the new community of Saint-Ours. He did not enjoy the advantages afforded his older brothers. He received only a “modest portion detached from his father’s large concession” (Greer, 1985, p. 26).

He married in 1753, at age 31, but his wife died 6 years later and he remarried in 1761. The inventories, notarized by laws governing inheritance, reveal that Theophile's farm was only 60 arpents, small but adequate to support his family. He could easily stride across his land, but he needed a mule to take him to its back end. He could plow his fields with minimum turns, and because clearing was continuous in adjoining lots, there was lots of sunlight, more than gloomy Upper Canadian farms with their patchwork carvings out of the wilderness. Since houses were always built at the front of the farms near the road, farmers could meet their neighbours without too much trouble. In fact, Theophile and his second wife, Felicite, would have been able to see many farmhouses.

The habitants were hardly ignorant. To manage their farms, woven tightly into their lifeworlds, they had to have a wide range of knowledge and skills at their disposal. Attuned to the rhythms of the seasons, the habitants had to know how to plow with a team of animals (much-loved horses or oxen or a mixed team). They used the heavy wheeled plow; they made the beam, axle, and handles from wood, fitting them with two wheels, a chain, an iron coulter, and a small iron plowshare. In May, after plowing, they sowed grain and seeds, covered by the passing of a harrow, a crude device made with wooden pegs mounted in a simple frame. A 19th-century English visitor judged them to be "miserable farmers" who "plough so very slight and careless, that they continue, year after year over the same clods which lie at the surface, without penetrating an inch deep into the soil" (cited in Innis, 1933, p. 297).

Women had the responsibility for the tilling and planting of the kitchen garden. With the arrival of summer, the habitants erected fences around freshly planted grain fields. They whitewashed the house and got on with other chores, like digging ditches. If they didn't learn how to sharpen their scythes, the tons of hay would lie uncut. The time of the grain harvest in the early fall was busy and bustling. After the harvest, internal fences had to be removed to allow animals to roam over the entire farm (Greer, 1985, pp. 28–30).

Although the habitants have been accused of using their lands inefficiently, Greer (1985) argues that they actually adapted to the exigencies of their own environment and immediate needs of their families. They had to devise precisely the right practices to extract a living from the soil with a minimum of effort (which precluded intensive cultivation so favoured by the improvers). They lacked capital. Banks didn't provide resources to enable them to adopt advanced techniques. They had to produce most of their own domestic goods and had little energy left over to listen to the advice of agricultural reformers. The habitants were self-directed, experiential adult learners. They learned by doing and farm knowledge resided in the collective oral memories of the farmers. They did not consult instructional books. They normally ran their own farm affairs. But once outside the household economy, they still felt the "burden of 'extra-economic' domination" (Greer, p. 88). The hand of the system extended into pockets of the lifeworld. No matter how subtle their management may have been, the seigneurs had ultimate control of the land, and, therefore, the people. Thus, the habitants were self-sufficient within the narrow confines of their households. Greer rightly observes that this "combination of peasant self-sufficiency, together with aristocratic appropriation through extra-economic compulsion, is the basically 'feudal' configuration that is essential to understanding this rural society" (p. 138).

The colonial administrators of New France did not permit any peasant self-organization. Any form of independent collective expression was quickly crushed. But these systemic constraints could not keep the lid on discontent fomented by seigneurial dues, *corvées*, and militia service. Food shortages also led to street protests. In 1704, for instance, habitants protested against increased salt prices. They marched on Montreal on November 18 and were immediately told that such marches were illegal. The discontented habitants wanted fixed salt prices. A similar protest broke out in Quebec City in the same year when the merchants raised prices during a poor harvest. The militia marched against the crowd and the habitants dispersed, running into the nearby woods. In August 1717, farmers close to the seigneurie of Longueuil rebelled against being forced to work on the building of a wall around Montreal. The demand couldn't have come at a worse time. They had numerous problems on their farms due to heavy rains. In a celebrated case of resistance to churchly tithes, the habitants forced the religious authorities to back off, demanding 1/13 of their produce. They had to settle for 1/26.

These rebellions were “thunder gusts of popular sentiment, but they did not bring any revolutionary storm” (Crowley, 1983, p. 144). Resistance to authority was episodic and did not reflect any sustained political learning processes. In France, one could correlate peasant protest with poor harvests. This was not the case in New France, where the food supply was not as insecure. Thus, these disturbances were “essentially non-political in character” and the “absence of large-scale protest fomented by the middle classes reflects not only political structures during the French regime, but also the mentality of the middle classes and their numerical weakness in the social structure” (Crowley, p. 136). The revolutionary ideas of anti-colonial America in the 1770s and France in the 1780s and 1790s needed critical conversational learning spaces to nurture the new idea of the Rights of Man in late 18th- and 19th-century New France. They weren't present before these tempestuous times. Crowley asserts that it was “only in the nineteenth century” that “popular protest [would] reach the next stage of ‘associational’ or ‘proactive’ violence intent on claiming rights, privileges, or resources not previously enjoyed by at least one segment of the population” (p. 144).

In a society with essentially no civil society infrastructure other than the Church (and it was hardly independent of royal authority and the mercantile economic system), parish priests easily moved into this vacuum and assumed community leadership. For their part, the illustrious nuns engaged in teaching and charitable work in and around hospitals. They were known for the sparkling white linens and, in the early to mid-17th century, extreme forms of pious expression. The habitants' religious expression was not an autonomous form of spiritual expression. The parish was imposed upon them, and it gradually became the “dominant social institution, after the family, in their lives” (Moogk, 2000, p. 211). Weekly church attendance gave ritual form and respite to the exacting lives of the habitants. At church, people could gossip and share news, and endure sermonic denunciations of the flesh and pleasure. A magical sacred canopy enveloping them gave cosmological meaning to the unpredictability of their lives, even though there is evidence of disrespectful attitudes to the church amongst habitants.

But what did the habitants actually believe about the world? How orthodox were they? They (and perhaps the religious orders, too) lived in a pre-Enlightenment world full

of supernatural forces and evil spirits of various kind. Roman Catholic dogma and folk beliefs fused into a popular religion of gaining protection from these malevolent forces. God, the Virgin Mary, and Saint Anne were appealed to for protection. The habitants used talismen to guide them on their dangerous journeys. Magical notions were rife. The habitants could not understand the Latin liturgies, but believed in their magical potency. Even the barrenness of a marriage was blamed on witchcraft. One Pierre Gadois succeeded in having his marriage annulled on the grounds that his wife was a victim of black magic. He remarried and had 14 children. Famously, colonists knelt before roadside crosses to ward off Satan and his minions. Habitants also believed in miraculous cures. Today one can visit Saint-Anne-de-Beaupré, where a collection of votive paintings attests to Saint Anne's miraculous powers to assist those in distress. Moreover, natural events, such as plague of caterpillars, would be countered by public invocations and processions.

Moogk (2000) thinks the colonists believed that the world was divinely ordered. The natural and social worlds were complex signs of mysterious supernatural forces at work.

The colonists' view of nature and of their world was very different from our own perspective, which is based on secular and materialistic assumptions Nature, we believe, is orderly and knowable. Their world was a dangerous place ruled by a God whose wrath or mercy was unpredictable. War and sickness were regarded as Heaven-sent scourges to achieve some inscrutable, divine purpose The faithful could make themselves worthy of this benefit by submission, austere morality, and devotion. (p. 240).

It is not clear how an event such as the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, where thousands of innocent worshippers were killed, would have been interpreted by the colonists of New France. Voltaire's skepticism was certainly intensified at such an arbitrary and seemingly meaningless event. What sense did it make that God would permit his faithful worshippers to perish? (Pearson, 2005, pp. 249–251)

But the world of Voltaire and the French Encyclopedists was far removed from superstitious New France. Some of the colonial administrators who breathed in the new ethos of suspicion were dubious about the various claims of bewitchment or sorcery. The new mechanistic world view, seeping into both British and French middle-class consciousness through popular education, had no room for these ruptures in its orderly functioning. They didn't think that witches really existed or that mental illness was demonic. As Moogk (2000) observes, "magic satisfied too many needs to be completely tossed out" (p. 244). Even if one ascribes to a clockwork world, the question of why that person suffered from that death at that particular time presses against one's rational inclinations. Colonists lived in a world full of the inexplicable and the dreadful. Their minds demanded some explanation; their hearts sought comfort; their souls demanded order. The literature found in the library, say, of a merchant trained in law, would have included mainly devotional books like the *Heures* and *Vie des saints*. Few habitants could read (perhaps 10%), but a few families would have had some religious texts to comfort their souls and regulate spiritual expression (Verette, 2004).

Women in New France

“Canadian history,” Jan Noel (1998) reminds us, “is unusual for the number of women recorded among its founders” (p. 1). Jeanne Mance was named co-founder of Montreal in 1642. The redoubtable duo, Marie de l’Incarnation and Marguerite Bourgeoys, established Canada’s first reasonably accessible education system. Why did these devotees come to New France? Rough, wild, male-dominated, dangerous: this place seemed hardly congenial for women. Fired by the millenarian religious revival in early 17th-century New France and embracing anti-flesh spirituality suffused with dreams and portents, Marie de l’Incarnation, formerly a businesswomen from Tours, believed that the Virgin Mary had beckoned her to this new world. Along with two other nuns, she founded an Ursulines convent at Quebec City in 1639 to educate girls. Tough and formidable, Marie de l’Incarnation, like other ascetic religious, thrashed herself and had visions of the devil. She wrote thousands of letters home, and they are perused lovingly by historians. She accepted patriarchal authority and exercised her power in her domain. One of the nuns’ most important roles was recruiting settlers in a period in New France’s history when few could be enticed to leave their homeland. They provided shelter for women immigrants, cared for sailors and soldiers, and put artisans to work building schools and convents.

The experience of women in this colonial society varied radically according to station in life. Aboriginal women suffered incredible disruption to their lives: thrown into disarray as an ancient way of life was transformed before their saddened eyes. At the other end of the social spectrum, noblewomen took their status from their husbands, who held leading positions in the government, the army, and the seigneuries. The women sent their children to nursemaids, and quickly dispatched their school-age children to boarding schools. Some devoted time to charitable activities. But their lives were also insecure. Noblemen often couldn’t make ends meet; they couldn’t sell their farm produce or gain from the fur trade. If the men died, their wives often took over the business enterprises; some directed significantly large commercial ventures. These enterprising noblewomen (merchant wives also took over businesses) must have been intentionally educated to do their business through mentoring.

The famed *filles du roi* (daughters of the king) came to a colony to be “instant brides” for men in desperate need of assistance on their farms and companionship in an inhospitable environment. Intendant Jean Talon wanted healthy young women for this harsh and unforgiving land. Between 1663 and 1673, 770 women, average age of 24, left farms and orphanages to sail for an unknown country. Although about 80 were from privileged backgrounds (and had probably lost their fathers), most were from humble circumstances. About one third had been plucked from the Parisian Hospital General. There, they supposedly were taught a trade and acquired elementary literacy. But only about one quarter could sign their names. These young women had experienced considerable hardship and suffering. It is difficult to imagine the learning and spiritual challenges they faced. If their men turned out to be brutes, that was bad enough, but they also faced disease, childbirth, back-breaking work, and war.

Consider the experience of an ordinary woman, Louise, born around 1645. She was placed in a poorhouse, where she learned the basics of religion, housekeeping, and knitting. That was her lifeworld curriculum. At age 13, she was sent out to do domestic

work. She returned to the Hospital at age 24, and a government agent arrived with an offer to pay her fare for New France. Fearful of the sea, after a 10-week crossing she arrived at the awesome cliffs of Quebec City, where she stayed at a boarding house supervised by the sisters. There she met numerous suitors that came calling. She chose one, and after travelling to Trois-Rivières she and her husband built a small cabin near the riverbank. Louise used her dowry to purchase a cow and some chickens.

From her neighbours, Louise learned how to turn suet into candles and bake bread in an outdoor oven. After the arrival of her first baby, work grew more arduous for this instant bride. Like so many women world over, she had to haul water, beat the wash, stoke the fires, turn the roast deer, mend clothes, tend to the cow, and care for the baby. When more children were born, the older ones, in time-honoured tradition, would keep an eye on the younger and help their burdened mother hoe the corn. After Louise lost her husband, who was drowned while canoeing, under *Coutume de Paris* she was entitled to run the farm. As for the voyageurs, the daunting work of managing the lifeworld inscribed itself on the bodies of these habitant *filles du roi*. They wore out in the service of peopling the land of New France (Noel, 1998, pp. 16–18).

The children of the *filles du roi* enjoyed a better life and diet than their counterparts in France, who were weighed down with taxes and were land-poor. Third-generation girls were receiving education from the nuns. In 1752, army engineer Louis Franquet lamented:

The sisters are spread out across the countryside . . . their usefulness seems evident, but the harm which results is like a slow poison which leads to a depopulation of the countryside, given that an educated girl . . . puts on airs, wants to set herself up in the city, sets her sights on a merchant . . . (cited in Noel, 1998, p. 20)

This sort of accusation rings down through the centuries of Canadian history. Even the enlightened philosophes of old France in the mid to late 18th century (thinkers like Rousseau, for example) were uneasy with learned women. Feuds even broke out over their alleged role as *salonnières* who were cramping men's argumentative styles. Nonetheless, women "played an unusually prominent role in the history of New France. Aboriginal women made essential contributions, including the powerful ones of the Iroquois culture with strong wills for ruling the longhouse" (Noel, 1988, p. 22). The legendary religious women, Jeanne Mance, Marguerite Bourgeoys, and Marie de l'Incarnation,

established too many lasting institutions, and were remembered too respectfully, to be shoved aside. As for the filles de roi, they wrote not a word. Yet they founded their own, living institutions in the little families that cut their clearings in the vast forests, then grew and roamed . . . The footsteps of all these women—bold or terrified, pious or forlorn, as they embarked from the ships onto city streets or riverside paths—have echoed through the centuries. Their legacy is with us still. It is part of your history and mine. (Noel, p. 23)

This is a most eloquent epitaph. But shadows lie across the experience of these women.

Craftsmen and Their Associations

One fascinating question that we may bring to our thinking about learning and life in New France is how the men and women who worked as shoemakers and stonemasons and carpenters and coopers, to name only a few crafts, learned to do their work. Today it is hard for us to imagine occupations and professions without thinking about lengthy periods of formal education. Community colleges and technical institutes abound in our hectic times. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the period of apprenticeship approximated the period given to technical training and the main craft organizational form was the guild. There were few, if any, craft schools present in either Old or New France. *The Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry on Education in the Province of Quebec*, published in 1963, claims that Bishop Laval's Grand Séminaire taught theology, chart making, and surveying, and that an arts and trades school was opened at St. Joachim for training in the trades. No historical evidence has been found for the existence of this trade school.

But the text-based education of the classic universities, originating in the medieval period, marked out a prestigious route to high status knowledge. The classic professions— theology and law—were acquired through mastery of textual interpretation and rhetorical persuasion. These were the models to which all professions would aspire. In his lovely book, *Building a House in New France* (1977), Moogk documents the way problem-based learning modes prevailed as a vernacular architecture emerged appropriate to the climate and landscape of the New World. Craftsmen built their houses mainly from memory and models in the community. But we begin to see the crystallization of experiential learning in the form of guidebooks to practice. Architects were the ones who knew what the authoritative texts on design were and referred to them in the construction process. Others, like administrators, clergy, teachers, lawyers, merchants, and army officers, drew upon texts to guide their form of work. In fact, the seats of administrative and religious power were centres of the textualization of experience. Consider: legal codes for magistrates, bailiffs, notaries, merchants; theology and liturgical works for ecclesiastics; pedagogical works for teachers; medical and pharmaceutical texts for doctors and surgeons; books on astronomy and geography for hydrographers. Administrative and religious centres were the collection points for the libraries of New France (Melançon, 2004).

Reading in New France was carefully monitored. The local market provided few, if any, books to choose from. Print culture was driven by the bourgeoisie and the clergy. Indeed, books were cherished companions of elites on their trips across the Atlantic. The heart of the literary heritage of New France was pious. Devotional works comprised the main diet, spiced with the professionally oriented works and the products of the new investigative curiosity to know the natural world. Even the teaching of reading was animated from deep religious sources. Children laboured to decipher letters, then words, then sentences. They were encouraged to practise reading out loud in anticipation of a prayer life. Their teachers discouraged idle reading, pressing their young students to not let the imaginations drift while reading simple texts (Melançon, 2004). But print culture was on the periphery of the formation of the habitant's outlook on life. Oral memory and folklore prevailed.

The apprenticeship system in New France was freer than that in the old country. Most of the apprentices were indentured. Without the presence of guilds and a specialized

group of master craftsmen, apprenticeship was shaped to the market's demands. Although apprentices were still bound legally to their masters and could not enter into other contracts or travel freely, their conditions of service in New France were free. Apprentices were even paid (sometimes in clothing) for their work, and merchants compensated for instructing their trainees. Other trades, such as gunsmiths or silversmiths, got in on the act and wanted their share, too. The sheer need for these tradespeople loosened the tight grip that masters usually had over their apprentices (which included demanding tasks outside of the occupation). Removing the master's fee also opened up crafts to the poor.

Canadian apprentices were spirited individualists. They didn't like the idea of working for other artisans. Although the law did not specify any limits to the number of apprentices one might have, Canadian artisans seldom had more than two at a time. Masters were the main adult educators (not journeymen). But the actual quality of their training may not have been up to French standards. Moogk (1971) comments:

The quality of training in Canada may have been inferior since there were no craft organizations to maintain a standard of skill and government regulation of quality was restricted to the food trades. Colonial craftsmen performed a variety of functions. Only a minority were proficient specialists. In New France versatility or non-specialization was the hallmark of seventeenth-century craftsmen and rural artisans. (p. 70)

Historical evidence indicates that many fathers passed their craft skills on to their sons. In New France, one did not move easily out of one's class location. There was little movement upward (although some merchants' sons chose humble occupations such as surgery or carpentry). Not surprisingly, habitants' male children chose low-status trades like masonry; their daughters could apprentice as seamstresses. Nor is it surprising that 1 in 10 apprentices in Quebec were stonecutters or masons. Stone construction was the preferred building material in the late 17th century. Work in the luxury trades (goldsmithing, for instance) prospered in the capital city. Montreal, in contrast, was less sophisticated and its trades followed agricultural rhythms (Moogk, 1971, pp. 71–75).

One of the fundamental ways that craftworkers learn about the wider context of their work is through self-organization. The royal government did not encourage artisanal self-organization in any way whatsoever. The king's officials, says Moogk (2000), were hostile to “unauthorized associations among the lower-ranking colonists, especially when these self-constituted groups had economic aims” (p. 195). But the fragmentation and particularism of the crafts didn't help matters. A collective consciousness couldn't take root easily. Indeed, individual crafts were preoccupied with their own status. Processions and parades carefully positioned crafts into a hierarchical ordering.

Religious notions intruded into the craft worlds. Each craft had its patron saint, and the saint's feast day called for drink and partying. Often these raucous gatherings caught the authorities' attention and accusations of scandalous behaviour were not uncommon. Workers' rituals affirmed identity. In 1645, for example, Quebec's toolmakers distributed bread that had been blessed to congregants in order of their rank. So, craft solidarity in New France was mostly confined to the safety of pious rituals and merrymaking dinners. Why were authorities so nervous about workers' voluntary associations? For one thing,

metropolitan elites feared the lower orders. French jurist Edme de Fréminville thought that private assemblies “always savor of licentiousness and only have in mind evil ends as their goals” (cited in Moogk, 2000, p. 197). Holding a private meeting meant that one had something to hide. For another, forbidding workers’ assemblies, it was thought, would undermine any devious and impious attempt to increase the price of goods.

How could various crafts gain a hearing? If a trade were licensed, it could gain a hearing from the authorities. But only trades linked to people’s health—bakers and butchers—and notaries and surgeons were licensed. The latter appeared to have been “more successful in defending their livelihood and even in extending their privileges” (Moogk, 2000, p. 199). Artisans, as we have seen, had a very difficult time gaining a voice. Even their religious confraternities were subordinated to the church. Crafts had little room to evolve vibrant and effective forms of solidarity and collective action. Confraternities such as Montreal’s *Confrérie de Saint-Éloi*—founded by five metalworkers in 1676—had too much fighting and drinking.

Still, expressions of collective voice occasionally broke through their confines. In 1728, shoemakers protested that an integrated business was hurting their craft by undercutting their prices. A butcher, apparently, was peddling cheap shoes in the outlying areas. Montreal’s lieutenant-general knew that this practice violated an intendant’s ordinance. If enforced, other craftsmen would take heart. This was dangerous for the governors. Low-ranking pressure groups would be encouraged. The shoemakers, a popular trade in the Montreal area, had been rebuffed by the Superior Council when they had submitted an earlier petition. Craftworkers in New France were vulnerable. Perhaps, as Moogk intimates, the artisans were actually losing their corporate traditions. In fact, the first strike in Canada in 1741 reveals two important things: the basic instincts of the colonial administration were repressive, and colonial workers were less likely than recent European immigrants to act collectively. Mid-18th-century colonists preferred to nest in their families and find satisfaction in self-employment (Moogk, 2000, pp. 204–209).

The Public Sphere in New France

Now we turn to search the social and political landscape of New France for evidence of spaces where people could reason together about the basic rules governing the spheres of labour and commodity exchange as well as forms of governance. In the first half of the 18th century in France, Germany, and England, we begin to see the appearance of newspapers in the daily lives of the merchant class. Merchants, both in New and Old France, needed information and wanted a voice in their countries’ economic futures. The state quickly saw that it ought to control the newspapers for its interests. But even here, when the state used newspapers to announce its instructions, it was addressing a nascent public. Soon after, the so-called “learned article” entered the press. Again, the state wanted to ensure writers’ allegiance to its authority. It would not be able to manage this control for very long. Gradually, in both newspapers and other journals, as well as in the growth of salons and coffee houses, a conversational learning space emerged that occupied space between state and economy (Crevari, 2005; Goodman, 1994; Habermas, 1989; Miller, 2006).

New France, however, had been created as a colonial outpost of the Ancien Régime, which was not going to tolerate a space between state and people. The monarch was the father, the colonists his children. To be truly educated meant that one could respond appropriately to the "call of duty, religion, and honor. It therefore followed that most of humankind, uneducated and, by nature, irrational and depraved, was unfit for government" (Moogk, 2000, p. 56). Indeed, even great liberal philosophical minds like Locke and Voltaire did not believe that the lowly masses could be enlightened. What chance did the habitants have? Thus, New France in the 17th and 18th centuries was constituted as an aristocratic, patriarchal, agricultural, and Roman Catholic community. This meant—and we arrive at the nub of the argument—that "unauthorized assemblies and collective public protests were serious offences in La Nouvelle France. . . ." (Moogk, 2000, p. 64). In a sense, this society could be accurately characterized as dictatorial. The Church monopolized formal education and authorized the Truth. The laity were pedagogical objects of dogmatic instruction. Their main task was simply to memorize the maxims and not think for themselves.

New France had occasional consultative assemblies. Only *les plus notables bourgeois* were asked their views on commodity prices. In the 18th century, Moogk (2000) observes, magistrates "relied less and less upon these advisory gatherings and used their own judgment to set the authorized prices for bread and meat. This unilateral process occasionally lost touch with current costs" (p. 69). The colonial assembly held no formal deliberative gatherings. In fact, Frontenac had his hand slapped for convoking even a consultative meeting. The royal authority feared that colonists might attain a corporate shape with real political potential.

But Montrealers had some conversational learning space available to them. The Holy Family Militia, established in 1663, permitted its squads to elect their own corporals. The following year, the local governor asked residents of the Island of Montreal to meet in a neutral, "public space," a barn in a common field, to select five judges to set commodity prices and to hear public order cases. Another example cited by Moogk (2000) concerns an attorney and spokesman for Montreal Island who cared for community-owned assets. He transmitted complaints to the seigneurial judge. However, the right to present collective grievances was soon denied by those in authority. An incipient public sphere and elementary deliberative learning processes were crushed.

Frontenac ended any form of popular representation in 1677. He forbade unauthorized private assemblies and the circulation of petitions (an early form of popular political education). In 1693, a Montreal surgeon was prosecuted for gathering signatures. A collective petition was deemed seditious because it cast doubt on a royal official's capacity to determine what was in the public's interest. But from 1717 onward, merchants could assemble to discuss trade and choose their own representatives, activities unavailable to those of lower status. Canadians were cast into the classic roles of colonials: junior in rank, gazing upward to authority far across the sea. The only durable popularly elected bodies in the St. Lawrence Valley were the vestry boards. This was small potatoes, because even here, the priests had to approve the candidates. Unused to exercising voice and inexperienced in self-organization, parish residents were reluctant to assemble to discuss even the maintenance of a community resource like a bridge or cemetery.

In sum, public demonstrations (at least eight occurred in New France over the price of grain, salt, and trade goods) did not really threaten the administrators. The colonists could be bought off with provision of lots of food, or frightened off by the smoking guns of the king's officers. Moogk (2000) argues that the "legislators' ideal of 'good order' was mechanistic as well as hierarchic" (p. 77). Influenced by Cartesian geometrics, educated administrators perceived society as a mechanism, with each person having a rationally determined place within it. The administrators exercised a disciplinary pedagogy over their subjects. All of the institutions and legal formulations of New France were harnessed toward the end of creating a submissive, hard-working, dutiful, pious subject. Ritual and law, and not doctrine, bound the people together into an exclusive community.

But this submissive spirit and authoritarian control over the people's minds didn't last for too long. In the aftermath of the Conquest, the spirit of Enlightenment migrated into Quebec, unsettling both governing and religious authorities. With the American colonies battling for independence from Britain, and French revolutionaries aiming to dethrone the monarchy, Quebec turned into a contested space. American revolutionaries were trying to entice Quebecers to join the revolution against Britain. Like its counterpart in France, the Roman Church set itself against any revolutionary currents. During this time of great disquiet and ideological contestation, people wanted news and viewpoints. A nascent reading public was in the process of formation (Hare, 2005; Laurence, 2005).

Fleury Mesplet, a printer and publisher born in Marseilles in 1734, established the first newspaper—the *Quebec Gazette*—in 1764. A proponent of Enlightenment ideas, Mesplet founded the *Gazette of Montreal* in 1778 and hired the gallant Voltairian, Valentin Jautard as his editor. There, in the back rooms of the *Gazette*, these emancipatory educators (including the flamboyant Henry-Antoine Mézière) introduced the critical spirit into an intellectually conservative culture. They challenged court decisions, railed against the abuses of the clergy, attacked the backwardness of the colleges, and advocated for a legislative assembly. This small republic of letters had a difficult time establishing a beachhead, however. The authorities jailed Mesplet, Jautard, and Pierre du Calvet for several years from 1789 to 1792. Historian Claude Galarneau (2007a) claims that "France's declaration of war against Great Britain in 1793 obviously put a stop to this current. For the second time in 15 years war had prevented a group of young and middle-aged intellectuals from developing" (cf. Brouillette, 2005; Galarneau 2007b; Hare, 2005; Murray 2005). Thus, post-conquest Quebec witnessed the migration of the critical spirit into its cultural and political life.

Conclusion

This essay has sketched the contours of New France as a learning society. I purposively subvert the prevalent notion that our contemporary society can be marked off from all previous societal forms by naming it as a "learning society." Here, I have focused on how men and women in New France learned to make a living in difficult circumstances, live their lives in a tightly managed hierarchical world, and express themselves before the idea of autonomous subjectivity was in full bloom. This paper has also explicated how the Roman Catholic Church provided the meaning framework within which people made their lives. By examining how men and women acquired the knowledge, skills, attitudes,

and sensibilities necessary to do the work that was before them, I have observed that an incipient professionalism (manifest through the textualization of experience) was present very early in Canadian history. The historical scholarship on the gradual emergence of a public sphere in both Europe and Canada served as an interpretive cue to search in New France for evidence of citizens assembling and engaging in conversational learning. This proved to be a valuable hermeneutical move, revealing that authorities in New France did not permit open dialogue as they sought to block the spirit of Enlightenment from seeping into this country at the end of the world. I can only hope that many Canadian adult education theorists will take up the challenge of writing history through the learning lens.

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Perspectives

“A COUNTRY AT THE END OF THE WORLD”: LIVING AND LEARNING IN NEW FRANCE, 1608–1760

Michael R. Welton

Abstract

This perspectives essay sketches how men and women of New France in the 17th and 18th centuries learned to make a living, live their lives, and express themselves under exceptionally difficult circumstances. This paper works with secondary sources, but brings new questions to old data. Among other things, the author explores how citizen learning was forbidden in 17th- and 18th-century New France, and at what historical point a critical adult education emerged. The author's narrative frame and interpretation of the sources constitute one of many legitimate forms of historical inquiry.

Résumé

Ce croquis d'essai perspective comment les hommes et les femmes de la Nouvelle-France au XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles ont appris à gagner leur vie, leur vie et s'exprimer dans des circonstances difficiles exceptionnellement. Cette usine papier avec secondaire sources, mais apporte de nouvelles questions d'anciennes données. Entre autres choses, l'auteur explore comment citoyen d'apprentissage a été interdite en Nouvelle-France XVIIe-XVIIIe siècle et à quel moment historique une critique de l'éducation des adultes est apparu. Trame narrative de l'auteur et l'interprétation des sources constituent une des nombreuses formes légitimes d'enquête historique.

Introduction

In the 1680s one intendant wrote that

Canada has always been regarded as a country at the end of the world, and as a [place of] exile that might almost pass for a sentence of civil death, and also as a refuge sought only by numerous wretches until now to escape from [the consequences of] their crimes. (cited in Moogk, 2000, p. 265)

To those tens of thousands, from a variety of humble and elegant backgrounds, who survived the ghastly 8- or 10-week journey creaking and groaning across the Atlantic, Canada might have seemed to be the end of the world. But between 1608 and 1760, before the French were defeated, a feudal society called New France gradually arose along the shores of the St. Lawrence Valley.

In this perspectives essay, I want to sketch the contours of this feudal society, called New France, as a learning society. I am interested in how the men and women of New France learned to make a living, live their lives, and express themselves under exceptionally difficult circumstances. This is a challenging task, first because most of the learning processes and pedagogical procedures were either non-formal or woven into life activities, and, second, we don't always have the records necessary to help us understand the instructional processes underpinning the work of constructing a New World society in the image of the old. This paper assumes that the contemporary discourse of the learning society (where learning is characterized as lifelong, lifewide, and learner-centred) can serve as a useful heuristic to construct the learning dynamics of all human societies, and not simply those of the modern era (with its self-conscious vocabulary of adult education). I work with secondary sources and have not done any original research into various archival sources, but I bring questions not previously addressed to these sources. I ask new questions of old data and, along the way, discover some new ways of thinking about the learning dynamics of early Canadian society. As far as I know, historians have not worked with the concept of the public sphere in the context of 17th- and 18th- century New France (particularly with my focus on the public sphere as a preeminent space for citizen learning and action-potential). Thus, it is my narrative frame and learning optic that shapes the way various secondary sources are used. This, I argue, is one of many legitimate ways of engaging in historical inquiry.

A Feudal Fragment in the New World

Roberta Hamilton (1988) argues that New France was "part of a feudal society of the Ancien Régime, and not, as most would have it, simply a pale imitation . . ." (p. 19). Indeed, it would have been unusual for those steeped in the tradition of lordly domination and kingly prerogative to invent something completely new. The central learning challenge faced by the elites in the metropolis was how to recreate feudal conditions in the New World to ensure the flow of goods into the imperial centre. This educative task demanded incredible financial resources and enormous energy to lure men and women from one world and transform them into habitants of another. To both get them and keep them, certain conventional feudal mechanisms were loosened, particularly in the early days of

clearing the land. But the form of governance, the organization of the seigneuries, the plight of the habitants, the basic form of apprenticeship, the privileged moral role of the Roman Catholic Church, and the outlook of the merchants did not break radically with feudal notions of how society ought to be organized.

Before the first wheat fields started waving in the winds off the St. Lawrence on the Island of Montreal, the fur trade had been in full swing for 100 years. Early modern Europe was mad for furs. New France was organized as a colonial outpost to ensure that this “brown gold” flowed into the old country. Beginning initially as an offshoot of the fishery, the fur trade gained so much momentum that by the 1590s, the French Crown wanted to ensure its control against its chief competitor, the English. The iconic explorer and soldier, Samuel de Champlain, of whom little is known, founded Quebec (Algonquian for “narrow passage”) in 1608 to control access to the interior. By 1627, France had granted the infamous Company of One Hundred Associates all of North American land not claimed by a Christian prince. This presumptuous move was tolerated by the First Nations peoples only because the Algonquians were at war with the Iroquois. Forming an alliance with the French was in their interest—but it would turn out to be a bargain with the devil.

This alliance between French and First Nations, forcing each into the other’s arms, created our first example of intercultural learning in Canadian history. Indians had helped Cartier’s scurvy-ridden men cure themselves with white cedar. Natives taught the French how to survive the winter. They supplied them with valuable geographical information. The French learned the value of birchbark canoes, toboggans, and snowshoes. They learned how to make maple sugar and collect berries. When the habitants began their farming, they soon planted seeds (pumpkins, squash, corn) gathered from Indians. Champlain and the Indians also exchanged people. The famed *coureur de bois*, Étienne Brûlé, and his native counterpart, Savignon, lived with the other culture for a time. This form of intercultural transmission was conducted informally, but it was an important learning exchange. Yet this communicative learning was asymmetrical, framed within the French imperial project of domination (Cook, 1993; Francis, Jones, & Smith, 2002; Jaenen, 1973).

The fur trade required the labour of aboriginal primary producers, canoemen, and traders. Each of these categories had to acquire the knowledge, skills, sensibility, and attitudes appropriate to their tasks. They were cogs in an economic system that extended far beyond their local environments. The Indians drew upon their intimate understanding of hunting and gathering (interpreting the signs of wind and smell and woods) to trap the beaver and other fur-bearing animals. Harnessed to a global system, their knowledge and skill gradually transformed them into trappers who were dependent on foreign goods for sustenance. This was probably not what they had bargained for. Some ended up demoralized, perhaps even traumatized, drifting in and around settlements like Montreal (Miller, 1989).

The *coureur de bois*, the voyageurs, are romantic figures in Canadian history and an interpretive challenge for social historians. What, exactly, drew them into this extremely dangerous form of work? Nobody quite knows for certain. They were largely recruited from the colony’s farm population (Dechene [1992] says that a quarter of the local men from Montreal participated in the trade, and 54% from Trois-Rivières [p. 118]). The farms didn’t allow them to earn enough to support their families. They could also escape from

the disciplinary restraints and social suffocation of life in a rudimentary society. These men were highly skilled. It helped if they were numerate and literate.

Usually, a canoe brigade was led by a leader who served as mentor for the others (between 1700 and 1750, canoes expanded from three- to eight-man crews). Pentland (1981) describes the process:

At the head was the conductor (originally the trader). Engages were placed in the canoes and paid according to their skill, an arrangement that provided both a status system and a training program. The isolation, the risks, the semi-military nature of organization, facilitated dependence on the leader and development of *esprit de corps*. The nature of the mature extended trade put a premium on paternalistic labour techniques in every respect. (p. 29)

As one Jesuit reported, "the sort of person who thought nothing of covering five to six hundred leagues by canoe, paddle in hand, or of living off corn and bear fat for twelve to eighteen months, or of sleeping in bark or branch cabins" was suited for the wilderness (cited in Dechene, 1992, p. 122). They carried bundles up to 200 pounds, portaged up riverbanks and along dried-out riverbeds, fought the tortuous mosquitoes with bear grease, survived the rapids, endured isolation for months on end, and, last but not least, chose suitable companions. W. J. Eccles (1969) opens a small window onto their world:

Squatting on a narrow thwart, legs cramped by bales of goods or furs, these men paddled hour after hour from dawn to dusk, pausing occasionally for a pipe while the professional raconteur spun a tale from his inexhaustible supply, singing folk songs to the dip of the paddle, forty-five or forty-eight strokes to the minute. (pp. 110–111)

Their bodies were their preeminent learning sites. Mind and muscle were attuned to extraordinary contingencies and unpredictable problems.

Nothing is known about how their psyches were educated for this work. But they must have had to learn to stave off madness. They may have accomplished this self-educative task by turning voyaging into a kin-related affair. They built social capital through their family networks. The *coureur de bois* may, perhaps, be one of our first Canadian examples of an outcast pedagogy. Theirs was a pedagogy of daring and danger, learned experientially in the face of death, a world far removed from the relative safety and moral surveillance of the Catholic "garrison culture" emerging reluctantly in the Canadian wilderness.

The Creation of the Habitant

The seigneurial system implanted in the St. Lawrence Valley in the 17th and 18th centuries required the peasantry to give over surpluses to the seigneurs and the church. The colonists were also required to tithe; the *corvée* was also used. The transformation of immigrants to the New World into habitants occurred within the legal framework, legitimated by the Royal Crown, of seigneurial ownership of land. The famous strip farms, now an indelible part of the Canadian historical imagination, were imposed upon the geography and landscape of New France. Those who ended up clearing and gaining a living from these lands had some

leeway, certainly, but were essentially bound to a legal system that extracted surplus from their labour.

Throughout the 17th century, the fur trade was the focus of economic activity in New France. But the Company of One Hundred Associates had little success attracting any significant population. Only when Louis XIV decided to rule Canada directly in 1663 would New France gain a “sizable European population, a rural and agrarian minority, and a social order resembling that of the mother country, erected on the site staked out earlier by the fur traders” (Greer, 1985, p. 4). The establishment of the seigneurial system shaped agricultural practices (and political conflict) well into the mid-19th century. This system created farms allowing for maximum access to the rivers. Goods and news travelled along the shores.

Army officers, clergy (the Sulpicians controlled Montreal), minor aristocrats, and others became seigneurs, but they had to “clear the grants and make them productive” (Greer, 1985, p. 4). They could subdivide the land and grant portions to *censitaires* (who could clear and cultivate their portion and pay rent). To protect the colony, seigneuries were often granted to army officers with the hope that their men would stay on as militia-farmers. The 17th-century seigneuries also served other functions. They were required to provide “custom and care for the ‘humble folk’” (Greer, p. 12). After 1763, the British had a difficult time adjusting to this system. They preferred landlords and tenants. The seigneurial system was abolished in 1854.

One of the main learning challenges facing the farmers of New France—most of whom were of urban and non-agricultural backgrounds—was to transform themselves from Frenchmen into peasants (Choquette, 1997). By the early 18th century, the Indian wars with the Iroquois had ceased. The early back-breaking work of clearing the land of trees and removing the stumps had been completed. At mid-century, agriculture was now the

chief pursuit of almost all the inhabitants of the area; the original craftsmen and army veterans-turned-settlers had been replaced by a new generation of Canadian born peasants for whom hunting, fur trading, and smuggling were at most marginal activities. A European rural society had emerged on this corner of the New World and it was one whose life centred on the self-sufficient peasant household. (Greer, 1985, p. 19)

For the habitant, the family household was the preeminent learning site. Wage labour was not yet important to the household. Work was primarily an affair of the entire family, with children not yet having an identity apart from the multifunctional household. The households were largely enclosed and self-contained, with a few communities (Sorel and Saint-Ours) having pasture in common. A glance inside a typical rural household in mid-18th-century New France provides insight into how they worked and what they had to know, be, and do. Theophile Allaire was head of his household in Saint-Ours. He was born in 1722, 12th of 15 children, into the crowded community of Île d’Orléans. He moved west with his family when he was only 3, settling in the new community of Saint-Ours. He did not enjoy the advantages afforded his older brothers. He received only a “modest portion detached from his father’s large concession” (Greer, 1985, p. 26).

He married in 1753, at age 31, but his wife died 6 years later and he remarried in 1761. The inventories, notarized by laws governing inheritance, reveal that Theophile's farm was only 60 arpents, small but adequate to support his family. He could easily stride across his land, but he needed a mule to take him to its back end. He could plow his fields with minimum turns, and because clearing was continuous in adjoining lots, there was lots of sunlight, more than gloomy Upper Canadian farms with their patchwork carvings out of the wilderness. Since houses were always built at the front of the farms near the road, farmers could meet their neighbours without too much trouble. In fact, Theophile and his second wife, Felicite, would have been able to see many farmhouses.

The habitants were hardly ignorant. To manage their farms, woven tightly into their lifeworlds, they had to have a wide range of knowledge and skills at their disposal. Attuned to the rhythms of the seasons, the habitants had to know how to plow with a team of animals (much-loved horses or oxen or a mixed team). They used the heavy wheeled plow; they made the beam, axle, and handles from wood, fitting them with two wheels, a chain, an iron coulter, and a small iron plowshare. In May, after plowing, they sowed grain and seeds, covered by the passing of a harrow, a crude device made with wooden pegs mounted in a simple frame. A 19th-century English visitor judged them to be "miserable farmers" who "plough so very slight and careless, that they continue, year after year over the same clods which lie at the surface, without penetrating an inch deep into the soil" (cited in Innis, 1933, p. 297).

Women had the responsibility for the tilling and planting of the kitchen garden. With the arrival of summer, the habitants erected fences around freshly planted grain fields. They whitewashed the house and got on with other chores, like digging ditches. If they didn't learn how to sharpen their scythes, the tons of hay would lie uncut. The time of the grain harvest in the early fall was busy and bustling. After the harvest, internal fences had to be removed to allow animals to roam over the entire farm (Greer, 1985, pp. 28–30).

Although the habitants have been accused of using their lands inefficiently, Greer (1985) argues that they actually adapted to the exigencies of their own environment and immediate needs of their families. They had to devise precisely the right practices to extract a living from the soil with a minimum of effort (which precluded intensive cultivation so favoured by the improvers). They lacked capital. Banks didn't provide resources to enable them to adopt advanced techniques. They had to produce most of their own domestic goods and had little energy left over to listen to the advice of agricultural reformers. The habitants were self-directed, experiential adult learners. They learned by doing and farm knowledge resided in the collective oral memories of the farmers. They did not consult instructional books. They normally ran their own farm affairs. But once outside the household economy, they still felt the "burden of 'extra-economic' domination" (Greer, p. 88). The hand of the system extended into pockets of the lifeworld. No matter how subtle their management may have been, the seigneurs had ultimate control of the land, and, therefore, the people. Thus, the habitants were self-sufficient within the narrow confines of their households. Greer rightly observes that this "combination of peasant self-sufficiency, together with aristocratic appropriation through extra-economic compulsion, is the basically 'feudal' configuration that is essential to understanding this rural society" (p. 138).

The colonial administrators of New France did not permit any peasant self-organization. Any form of independent collective expression was quickly crushed. But these systemic constraints could not keep the lid on discontent fomented by seigneurial dues, *corvées*, and militia service. Food shortages also led to street protests. In 1704, for instance, habitants protested against increased salt prices. They marched on Montreal on November 18 and were immediately told that such marches were illegal. The discontented habitants wanted fixed salt prices. A similar protest broke out in Quebec City in the same year when the merchants raised prices during a poor harvest. The militia marched against the crowd and the habitants dispersed, running into the nearby woods. In August 1717, farmers close to the seigneurie of Longueuil rebelled against being forced to work on the building of a wall around Montreal. The demand couldn't have come at a worse time. They had numerous problems on their farms due to heavy rains. In a celebrated case of resistance to churchly tithes, the habitants forced the religious authorities to back off, demanding 1/13 of their produce. They had to settle for 1/26.

These rebellions were “thunder gusts of popular sentiment, but they did not bring any revolutionary storm” (Crowley, 1983, p. 144). Resistance to authority was episodic and did not reflect any sustained political learning processes. In France, one could correlate peasant protest with poor harvests. This was not the case in New France, where the food supply was not as insecure. Thus, these disturbances were “essentially non-political in character” and the “absence of large-scale protest fomented by the middle classes reflects not only political structures during the French regime, but also the mentality of the middle classes and their numerical weakness in the social structure” (Crowley, p. 136). The revolutionary ideas of anti-colonial America in the 1770s and France in the 1780s and 1790s needed critical conversational learning spaces to nurture the new idea of the Rights of Man in late 18th- and 19th-century New France. They weren't present before these tempestuous times. Crowley asserts that it was “only in the nineteenth century” that “popular protest [would] reach the next stage of ‘associational’ or ‘proactive’ violence intent on claiming rights, privileges, or resources not previously enjoyed by at least one segment of the population” (p. 144).

In a society with essentially no civil society infrastructure other than the Church (and it was hardly independent of royal authority and the mercantile economic system), parish priests easily moved into this vacuum and assumed community leadership. For their part, the illustrious nuns engaged in teaching and charitable work in and around hospitals. They were known for the sparkling white linens and, in the early to mid-17th century, extreme forms of pious expression. The habitants' religious expression was not an autonomous form of spiritual expression. The parish was imposed upon them, and it gradually became the “dominant social institution, after the family, in their lives” (Moogk, 2000, p. 211). Weekly church attendance gave ritual form and respite to the exacting lives of the habitants. At church, people could gossip and share news, and endure sermonic denunciations of the flesh and pleasure. A magical sacred canopy enveloping them gave cosmological meaning to the unpredictability of their lives, even though there is evidence of disrespectful attitudes to the church amongst habitants.

But what did the habitants actually believe about the world? How orthodox were they? They (and perhaps the religious orders, too) lived in a pre-Enlightenment world full

of supernatural forces and evil spirits of various kind. Roman Catholic dogma and folk beliefs fused into a popular religion of gaining protection from these malevolent forces. God, the Virgin Mary, and Saint Anne were appealed to for protection. The habitants used talismen to guide them on their dangerous journeys. Magical notions were rife. The habitants could not understand the Latin liturgies, but believed in their magical potency. Even the barrenness of a marriage was blamed on witchcraft. One Pierre Gadois succeeded in having his marriage annulled on the grounds that his wife was a victim of black magic. He remarried and had 14 children. Famously, colonists knelt before roadside crosses to ward off Satan and his minions. Habitants also believed in miraculous cures. Today one can visit Saint-Anne-de-Beaupré, where a collection of votive paintings attests to Saint Anne's miraculous powers to assist those in distress. Moreover, natural events, such as plague of caterpillars, would be countered by public invocations and processions.

Moogk (2000) thinks the colonists believed that the world was divinely ordered. The natural and social worlds were complex signs of mysterious supernatural forces at work.

The colonists' view of nature and of their world was very different from our own perspective, which is based on secular and materialistic assumptions Nature, we believe, is orderly and knowable. Their world was a dangerous place ruled by a God whose wrath or mercy was unpredictable. War and sickness were regarded as Heaven-sent scourges to achieve some inscrutable, divine purpose The faithful could make themselves worthy of this benefit by submission, austere morality, and devotion. (p. 240).

It is not clear how an event such as the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, where thousands of innocent worshippers were killed, would have been interpreted by the colonists of New France. Voltaire's skepticism was certainly intensified at such an arbitrary and seemingly meaningless event. What sense did it make that God would permit his faithful worshippers to perish? (Pearson, 2005, pp. 249–251)

But the world of Voltaire and the French Encyclopedists was far removed from superstitious New France. Some of the colonial administrators who breathed in the new ethos of suspicion were dubious about the various claims of bewitchment or sorcery. The new mechanistic world view, seeping into both British and French middle-class consciousness through popular education, had no room for these ruptures in its orderly functioning. They didn't think that witches really existed or that mental illness was demonic. As Moogk (2000) observes, "magic satisfied too many needs to be completely tossed out" (p. 244). Even if one ascribes to a clockwork world, the question of why that person suffered from that death at that particular time presses against one's rational inclinations. Colonists lived in a world full of the inexplicable and the dreadful. Their minds demanded some explanation; their hearts sought comfort; their souls demanded order. The literature found in the library, say, of a merchant trained in law, would have included mainly devotional books like the *Heures* and *Vie des saints*. Few habitants could read (perhaps 10%), but a few families would have had some religious texts to comfort their souls and regulate spiritual expression (Verette, 2004).

Women in New France

“Canadian history,” Jan Noel (1998) reminds us, “is unusual for the number of women recorded among its founders” (p. 1). Jeanne Mance was named co-founder of Montreal in 1642. The redoubtable duo, Marie de l’Incarnation and Marguerite Bourgeoys, established Canada’s first reasonably accessible education system. Why did these devotees come to New France? Rough, wild, male-dominated, dangerous: this place seemed hardly congenial for women. Fired by the millenarian religious revival in early 17th-century New France and embracing anti-flesh spirituality suffused with dreams and portents, Marie de l’Incarnation, formerly a businesswomen from Tours, believed that the Virgin Mary had beckoned her to this new world. Along with two other nuns, she founded an Ursulines convent at Quebec City in 1639 to educate girls. Tough and formidable, Marie de l’Incarnation, like other ascetic religious, thrashed herself and had visions of the devil. She wrote thousands of letters home, and they are perused lovingly by historians. She accepted patriarchal authority and exercised her power in her domain. One of the nuns’ most important roles was recruiting settlers in a period in New France’s history when few could be enticed to leave their homeland. They provided shelter for women immigrants, cared for sailors and soldiers, and put artisans to work building schools and convents.

The experience of women in this colonial society varied radically according to station in life. Aboriginal women suffered incredible disruption to their lives: thrown into disarray as an ancient way of life was transformed before their saddened eyes. At the other end of the social spectrum, noblewomen took their status from their husbands, who held leading positions in the government, the army, and the seigneuries. The women sent their children to nursemaids, and quickly dispatched their school-age children to boarding schools. Some devoted time to charitable activities. But their lives were also insecure. Noblemen often couldn’t make ends meet; they couldn’t sell their farm produce or gain from the fur trade. If the men died, their wives often took over the business enterprises; some directed significantly large commercial ventures. These enterprising noblewomen (merchant wives also took over businesses) must have been intentionally educated to do their business through mentoring.

The famed *filles du roi* (daughters of the king) came to a colony to be “instant brides” for men in desperate need of assistance on their farms and companionship in an inhospitable environment. Intendant Jean Talon wanted healthy young women for this harsh and unforgiving land. Between 1663 and 1673, 770 women, average age of 24, left farms and orphanages to sail for an unknown country. Although about 80 were from privileged backgrounds (and had probably lost their fathers), most were from humble circumstances. About one third had been plucked from the Parisian Hospital General. There, they supposedly were taught a trade and acquired elementary literacy. But only about one quarter could sign their names. These young women had experienced considerable hardship and suffering. It is difficult to imagine the learning and spiritual challenges they faced. If their men turned out to be brutes, that was bad enough, but they also faced disease, childbirth, back-breaking work, and war.

Consider the experience of an ordinary woman, Louise, born around 1645. She was placed in a poorhouse, where she learned the basics of religion, housekeeping, and knitting. That was her lifeworld curriculum. At age 13, she was sent out to do domestic

work. She returned to the Hospital at age 24, and a government agent arrived with an offer to pay her fare for New France. Fearful of the sea, after a 10-week crossing she arrived at the awesome cliffs of Quebec City, where she stayed at a boarding house supervised by the sisters. There she met numerous suitors that came calling. She chose one, and after travelling to Trois-Rivières she and her husband built a small cabin near the riverbank. Louise used her dowry to purchase a cow and some chickens.

From her neighbours, Louise learned how to turn suet into candles and bake bread in an outdoor oven. After the arrival of her first baby, work grew more arduous for this instant bride. Like so many women world over, she had to haul water, beat the wash, stoke the fires, turn the roast deer, mend clothes, tend to the cow, and care for the baby. When more children were born, the older ones, in time-honoured tradition, would keep an eye on the younger and help their burdened mother hoe the corn. After Louise lost her husband, who was drowned while canoeing, under *Coutume de Paris* she was entitled to run the farm. As for the voyageurs, the daunting work of managing the lifeworld inscribed itself on the bodies of these habitant *filles du roi*. They wore out in the service of peopling the land of New France (Noel, 1998, pp. 16–18).

The children of the *filles du roi* enjoyed a better life and diet than their counterparts in France, who were weighed down with taxes and were land-poor. Third-generation girls were receiving education from the nuns. In 1752, army engineer Louis Franquet lamented:

The sisters are spread out across the countryside . . . their usefulness seems evident, but the harm which results is like a slow poison which leads to a depopulation of the countryside, given that an educated girl . . . puts on airs, wants to set herself up in the city, sets her sights on a merchant . . . (cited in Noel, 1998, p. 20)

This sort of accusation rings down through the centuries of Canadian history. Even the enlightened philosophes of old France in the mid to late 18th century (thinkers like Rousseau, for example) were uneasy with learned women. Feuds even broke out over their alleged role as *salonnières* who were cramping men's argumentative styles. Nonetheless, women "played an unusually prominent role in the history of New France. Aboriginal women made essential contributions, including the powerful ones of the Iroquois culture with strong wills for ruling the longhouse" (Noel, 1988, p. 22). The legendary religious women, Jeanne Mance, Marguerite Bourgeoys, and Marie de l'Incarnation,

established too many lasting institutions, and were remembered too respectfully, to be shoved aside. As for the filles de roi, they wrote not a word. Yet they founded their own, living institutions in the little families that cut their clearings in the vast forests, then grew and roamed . . . The footsteps of all these women—bold or terrified, pious or forlorn, as they embarked from the ships onto city streets or riverside paths—have echoed through the centuries. Their legacy is with us still. It is part of your history and mine. (Noel, p. 23)

This is a most eloquent epitaph. But shadows lie across the experience of these women.

Craftsmen and Their Associations

One fascinating question that we may bring to our thinking about learning and life in New France is how the men and women who worked as shoemakers and stonemasons and carpenters and coopers, to name only a few crafts, learned to do their work. Today it is hard for us to imagine occupations and professions without thinking about lengthy periods of formal education. Community colleges and technical institutes abound in our hectic times. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the period of apprenticeship approximated the period given to technical training and the main craft organizational form was the guild. There were few, if any, craft schools present in either Old or New France. The *Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry on Education in the Province of Quebec*, published in 1963, claims that Bishop Laval's Grand Séminaire taught theology, chart making, and surveying, and that an arts and trades school was opened at St. Joachim for training in the trades. No historical evidence has been found for the existence of this trade school.

But the text-based education of the classic universities, originating in the medieval period, marked out a prestigious route to high status knowledge. The classic professions— theology and law—were acquired through mastery of textual interpretation and rhetorical persuasion. These were the models to which all professions would aspire. In his lovely book, *Building a House in New France* (1977), Moogk documents the way problem-based learning modes prevailed as a vernacular architecture emerged appropriate to the climate and landscape of the New World. Craftsmen built their houses mainly from memory and models in the community. But we begin to see the crystallization of experiential learning in the form of guidebooks to practice. Architects were the ones who knew what the authoritative texts on design were and referred to them in the construction process. Others, like administrators, clergy, teachers, lawyers, merchants, and army officers, drew upon texts to guide their form of work. In fact, the seats of administrative and religious power were centres of the textualization of experience. Consider: legal codes for magistrates, bailiffs, notaries, merchants; theology and liturgical works for ecclesiastics; pedagogical works for teachers; medical and pharmaceutical texts for doctors and surgeons; books on astronomy and geography for hydrographers. Administrative and religious centres were the collection points for the libraries of New France (Melançon, 2004).

Reading in New France was carefully monitored. The local market provided few, if any, books to choose from. Print culture was driven by the bourgeoisie and the clergy. Indeed, books were cherished companions of elites on their trips across the Atlantic. The heart of the literary heritage of New France was pious. Devotional works comprised the main diet, spiced with the professionally oriented works and the products of the new investigative curiosity to know the natural world. Even the teaching of reading was animated from deep religious sources. Children laboured to decipher letters, then words, then sentences. They were encouraged to practise reading out loud in anticipation of a prayer life. Their teachers discouraged idle reading, pressing their young students to not let the imaginations drift while reading simple texts (Melançon, 2004). But print culture was on the periphery of the formation of the habitant's outlook on life. Oral memory and folklore prevailed.

The apprenticeship system in New France was freer than that in the old country. Most of the apprentices were indentured. Without the presence of guilds and a specialized

group of master craftsmen, apprenticeship was shaped to the market's demands. Although apprentices were still bound legally to their masters and could not enter into other contracts or travel freely, their conditions of service in New France were free. Apprentices were even paid (sometimes in clothing) for their work, and merchants compensated for instructing their trainees. Other trades, such as gunsmiths or silversmiths, got in on the act and wanted their share, too. The sheer need for these tradespeople loosened the tight grip that masters usually had over their apprentices (which included demanding tasks outside of the occupation). Removing the master's fee also opened up crafts to the poor.

Canadian apprentices were spirited individualists. They didn't like the idea of working for other artisans. Although the law did not specify any limits to the number of apprentices one might have, Canadian artisans seldom had more than two at a time. Masters were the main adult educators (not journeymen). But the actual quality of their training may not have been up to French standards. Moogk (1971) comments:

The quality of training in Canada may have been inferior since there were no craft organizations to maintain a standard of skill and government regulation of quality was restricted to the food trades. Colonial craftsmen performed a variety of functions. Only a minority were proficient specialists. In New France versatility or non-specialization was the hallmark of seventeenth-century craftsmen and rural artisans. (p. 70)

Historical evidence indicates that many fathers passed their craft skills on to their sons. In New France, one did not move easily out of one's class location. There was little movement upward (although some merchants' sons chose humble occupations such as surgery or carpentry). Not surprisingly, habitants' male children chose low-status trades like masonry; their daughters could apprentice as seamstresses. Nor is it surprising that 1 in 10 apprentices in Quebec were stonecutters or masons. Stone construction was the preferred building material in the late 17th century. Work in the luxury trades (goldsmithing, for instance) prospered in the capital city. Montreal, in contrast, was less sophisticated and its trades followed agricultural rhythms (Moogk, 1971, pp. 71–75).

One of the fundamental ways that craftworkers learn about the wider context of their work is through self-organization. The royal government did not encourage artisanal self-organization in any way whatsoever. The king's officials, says Moogk (2000), were hostile to “unauthorized associations among the lower-ranking colonists, especially when these self-constituted groups had economic aims” (p. 195). But the fragmentation and particularism of the crafts didn't help matters. A collective consciousness couldn't take root easily. Indeed, individual crafts were preoccupied with their own status. Processions and parades carefully positioned crafts into a hierarchical ordering.

Religious notions intruded into the craft worlds. Each craft had its patron saint, and the saint's feast day called for drink and partying. Often these raucous gatherings caught the authorities' attention and accusations of scandalous behaviour were not uncommon. Workers' rituals affirmed identity. In 1645, for example, Quebec's toolmakers distributed bread that had been blessed to congregants in order of their rank. So, craft solidarity in New France was mostly confined to the safety of pious rituals and merrymaking dinners. Why were authorities so nervous about workers' voluntary associations? For one thing,

metropolitan elites feared the lower orders. French jurist Edme de Fréminville thought that private assemblies “always savor of licentiousness and only have in mind evil ends as their goals” (cited in Moogk, 2000, p. 197). Holding a private meeting meant that one had something to hide. For another, forbidding workers’ assemblies, it was thought, would undermine any devious and impious attempt to increase the price of goods.

How could various crafts gain a hearing? If a trade were licensed, it could gain a hearing from the authorities. But only trades linked to people’s health—bakers and butchers—and notaries and surgeons were licensed. The latter appeared to have been “more successful in defending their livelihood and even in extending their privileges” (Moogk, 2000, p. 199). Artisans, as we have seen, had a very difficult time gaining a voice. Even their religious confraternities were subordinated to the church. Crafts had little room to evolve vibrant and effective forms of solidarity and collective action. Confraternities such as Montreal’s *Confrérie de Saint-Éloi*—founded by five metalworkers in 1676—had too much fighting and drinking.

Still, expressions of collective voice occasionally broke through their confines. In 1728, shoemakers protested that an integrated business was hurting their craft by undercutting their prices. A butcher, apparently, was peddling cheap shoes in the outlying areas. Montreal’s lieutenant-general knew that this practice violated an intendant’s ordinance. If enforced, other craftsmen would take heart. This was dangerous for the governors. Low-ranking pressure groups would be encouraged. The shoemakers, a popular trade in the Montreal area, had been rebuffed by the Superior Council when they had submitted an earlier petition. Craftworkers in New France were vulnerable. Perhaps, as Moogk intimates, the artisans were actually losing their corporate traditions. In fact, the first strike in Canada in 1741 reveals two important things: the basic instincts of the colonial administration were repressive, and colonial workers were less likely than recent European immigrants to act collectively. Mid-18th-century colonists preferred to nest in their families and find satisfaction in self-employment (Moogk, 2000, pp. 204–209).

The Public Sphere in New France

Now we turn to search the social and political landscape of New France for evidence of spaces where people could reason together about the basic rules governing the spheres of labour and commodity exchange as well as forms of governance. In the first half of the 18th century in France, Germany, and England, we begin to see the appearance of newspapers in the daily lives of the merchant class. Merchants, both in New and Old France, needed information and wanted a voice in their countries’ economic futures. The state quickly saw that it ought to control the newspapers for its interests. But even here, when the state used newspapers to announce its instructions, it was addressing a nascent public. Soon after, the so-called “learned article” entered the press. Again, the state wanted to ensure writers’ allegiance to its authority. It would not be able to manage this control for very long. Gradually, in both newspapers and other journals, as well as in the growth of salons and coffee houses, a conversational learning space emerged that occupied space between state and economy (Crevari, 2005; Goodman, 1994; Habermas, 1989; Miller, 2006).

New France, however, had been created as a colonial outpost of the Ancien Régime, which was not going to tolerate a space between state and people. The monarch was the father, the colonists his children. To be truly educated meant that one could respond appropriately to the "call of duty, religion, and honor. It therefore followed that most of humankind, uneducated and, by nature, irrational and depraved, was unfit for government" (Moogk, 2000, p. 56). Indeed, even great liberal philosophical minds like Locke and Voltaire did not believe that the lowly masses could be enlightened. What chance did the habitants have? Thus, New France in the 17th and 18th centuries was constituted as an aristocratic, patriarchal, agricultural, and Roman Catholic community. This meant—and we arrive at the nub of the argument—that "unauthorized assemblies and collective public protests were serious offences in La Nouvelle France. . . ." (Moogk, 2000, p. 64). In a sense, this society could be accurately characterized as dictatorial. The Church monopolized formal education and authorized the Truth. The laity were pedagogical objects of dogmatic instruction. Their main task was simply to memorize the maxims and not think for themselves.

New France had occasional consultative assemblies. Only *les plus notables bourgeois* were asked their views on commodity prices. In the 18th century, Moogk (2000) observes, magistrates "relied less and less upon these advisory gatherings and used their own judgment to set the authorized prices for bread and meat. This unilateral process occasionally lost touch with current costs" (p. 69). The colonial assembly held no formal deliberative gatherings. In fact, Frontenac had his hand slapped for convoking even a consultative meeting. The royal authority feared that colonists might attain a corporate shape with real political potential.

But Montrealers had some conversational learning space available to them. The Holy Family Militia, established in 1663, permitted its squads to elect their own corporals. The following year, the local governor asked residents of the Island of Montreal to meet in a neutral, "public space," a barn in a common field, to select five judges to set commodity prices and to hear public order cases. Another example cited by Moogk (2000) concerns an attorney and spokesman for Montreal Island who cared for community-owned assets. He transmitted complaints to the seigneurial judge. However, the right to present collective grievances was soon denied by those in authority. An incipient public sphere and elementary deliberative learning processes were crushed.

Frontenac ended any form of popular representation in 1677. He forbade unauthorized private assemblies and the circulation of petitions (an early form of popular political education). In 1693, a Montreal surgeon was prosecuted for gathering signatures. A collective petition was deemed seditious because it cast doubt on a royal official's capacity to determine what was in the public's interest. But from 1717 onward, merchants could assemble to discuss trade and choose their own representatives, activities unavailable to those of lower status. Canadians were cast into the classic roles of colonials: junior in rank, gazing upward to authority far across the sea. The only durable popularly elected bodies in the St. Lawrence Valley were the vestry boards. This was small potatoes, because even here, the priests had to approve the candidates. Unused to exercising voice and inexperienced in self-organization, parish residents were reluctant to assemble to discuss even the maintenance of a community resource like a bridge or cemetery.

In sum, public demonstrations (at least eight occurred in New France over the price of grain, salt, and trade goods) did not really threaten the administrators. The colonists could be bought off with provision of lots of food, or frightened off by the smoking guns of the king's officers. Moogk (2000) argues that the "legislators' ideal of 'good order' was mechanistic as well as hierarchic" (p. 77). Influenced by Cartesian geometrics, educated administrators perceived society as a mechanism, with each person having a rationally determined place within it. The administrators exercised a disciplinary pedagogy over their subjects. All of the institutions and legal formulations of New France were harnessed toward the end of creating a submissive, hard-working, dutiful, pious subject. Ritual and law, and not doctrine, bound the people together into an exclusive community.

But this submissive spirit and authoritarian control over the people's minds didn't last for too long. In the aftermath of the Conquest, the spirit of Enlightenment migrated into Quebec, unsettling both governing and religious authorities. With the American colonies battling for independence from Britain, and French revolutionaries aiming to dethrone the monarchy, Quebec turned into a contested space. American revolutionaries were trying to entice Quebecers to join the revolution against Britain. Like its counterpart in France, the Roman Church set itself against any revolutionary currents. During this time of great disquiet and ideological contestation, people wanted news and viewpoints. A nascent reading public was in the process of formation (Hare, 2005; Laurence, 2005).

Fleury Mesplet, a printer and publisher born in Marseilles in 1734, established the first newspaper—the *Quebec Gazette*—in 1764. A proponent of Enlightenment ideas, Mesplet founded the *Gazette of Montreal* in 1778 and hired the gallant Voltairian, Valentin Jautard as his editor. There, in the back rooms of the *Gazette*, these emancipatory educators (including the flamboyant Henry-Antoine Mézière) introduced the critical spirit into an intellectually conservative culture. They challenged court decisions, railed against the abuses of the clergy, attacked the backwardness of the colleges, and advocated for a legislative assembly. This small republic of letters had a difficult time establishing a beachhead, however. The authorities jailed Mesplet, Jautard, and Pierre du Calvet for several years from 1789 to 1792. Historian Claude Galarneau (2007a) claims that "France's declaration of war against Great Britain in 1793 obviously put a stop to this current. For the second time in 15 years war had prevented a group of young and middle-aged intellectuals from developing" (cf. Brouillette, 2005; Galarneau 2007b; Hare, 2005; Murray 2005). Thus, post-conquest Quebec witnessed the migration of the critical spirit into its cultural and political life.

Conclusion

This essay has sketched the contours of New France as a learning society. I purposively subvert the prevalent notion that our contemporary society can be marked off from all previous societal forms by naming it as a "learning society." Here, I have focused on how men and women in New France learned to make a living in difficult circumstances, live their lives in a tightly managed hierarchical world, and express themselves before the idea of autonomous subjectivity was in full bloom. This paper has also explicated how the Roman Catholic Church provided the meaning framework within which people made their lives. By examining how men and women acquired the knowledge, skills, attitudes,

and sensibilities necessary to do the work that was before them, I have observed that an incipient professionalism (manifest through the textualization of experience) was present very early in Canadian history. The historical scholarship on the gradual emergence of a public sphere in both Europe and Canada served as an interpretive cue to search in New France for evidence of citizens assembling and engaging in conversational learning. This proved to be a valuable hermeneutical move, revealing that authorities in New France did not permit open dialogue as they sought to block the spirit of Enlightenment from seeping into this country at the end of the world. I can only hope that many Canadian adult education theorists will take up the challenge of writing history through the learning lens.

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