

It Began With Fish and Furs

A book review by John D. Wilson

The early period in colonial Nova Scotia was turbulent and complex. As Peter Landry writes in his new history, *The Lion & The Lily*, it began with fish and furs and ended in all-out warfare for dominance in North America between two 18th century super powers. In between are stories of political intrigue, deceit and betrayal, sacrifice and heroism, unlikely victories and ignominious defeats. Throughout it all, European settlers, mostly fishermen and farmers, poorly supported by their governments, often abandoned by their patrons, managed to gain a foothold and eventually prosper in this inhospitable land.

In *The Lion & The Lily*, is a history of Nova Scotia between the years 1600 and 1760, Landry draws extensively from published materials, contemporaneous notes and letters, and the work of reputable historians to provide a factual account of events and people of the time. Unlike many modern interpretations of history he does not attribute motive or ethic beyond the contemporary record. He has the confidence in the reader to let history speak for itself, trusting them to draw their own conclusions about the motives of the propagandists. Landry's sources are extensive, all diligently listed in the back of the book, along with copious notes, and indexes.

Peter Landry is a practicing lawyer in Dartmouth. He is also a person of eclectic interests, as one will soon discover upon visiting his popular website, www.blupete.com. Perhaps it is because this book comes out of his on-line history essays, which are modular in structure, that Landry has adopted what is to me a somewhat unique approach to the written text. Each part and chapter is a stand-alone essay, however, he has included at the beginning of each a brief summary that enables the casual, or specific, researcher to easily place events of particular interest into the broader historical context.

Landry's writing style is clean with a pleasant turn of phrase that draws the reader into the narrative. It is clear from the text that he has walked the land and visited the sites of which he writes. The reader is invited to travel with him in his journey through Nova Scotia's history.

As an example: On the morning of June 8th, 1758, at the very beginning of the attack on Louisbourg, the French were expecting the English to come ashore at Kennington Cove. They had dug in and were well prepared for the assault. They withstood the naval bombardment and were initially successful, forcing Wolfe's landing boats to retreat. However, by sheer accident, while trying to avoid French fire, one of Wolfe's officers spotted a small chink in the defenses.

As Landry describes it, "...a little space running into a large split rock, a perfect docking space for a rowboat, maybe two inline; a space parapeted to the left and to the right with granite rock. This small group of soldiers, lead by Lieutenants Hopkins and Brown and Ensign Grant of the 35th Regiment, who sought the place out for shelter soon realized that they had a perfect footing on the shore."

The strange thing was, they could see the French watch tower on the bluff above them that had been built specifically to guard the end of the cove. For some inexplicable reason it was unmanned. "This was unbelievable: this small group of English soldiers was ashore, and, it would appear, the French did not know they had arrived."

One can imagine Landry, standing near this very split in the rocks at the eastern end of Kennington Cove, his back to the sea, looking up at the bluff where the watchtower once stood, wondering how on earth the French commanders could have failed to man this strategic location.

Perhaps the English would have succeeded at Louisbourg in any case, but the undetected landing begun by this handful of soldiers lead to the establishment of a beachhead and ultimately to the fall of one of the greatest forts in all 18th century North America. There are many such episodes described in this book. Gripping stuff!

This is in a thick book; 420 pages of text, plus 211 pages of notes, plus indexes. A great source of historical information.

Some readers may not be interested in all parts. I, for instance, am not particularly interested in the family feuds amongst members of the La Tour family. However, because of the book's structure, the reader may skip chapters, or even parts, without losing the context of events in the overall history.

In addition to being a good read, *The Lion & The Lily* is ideally suited for personal reference. It should also find a prominent place in public and highschool libraries.

Our colonial history continued for more than one hundred years beyond 1760, so the story is unfinished. Fortunately, *The Lion & The Lily* ends on a hopeful note: "This is the subject of a further book."

John D. Wilson is a history buff and a researcher for the West Hants Historical Society.

For more information on *The Lion & The Lily* go to Mr. Landry's website www.blupete.com where more information on the work together on how it might be ordered is set out in the "Features" page. *The Lion & The Lily* is published by Trafford Publishing and is available through all the large online book sellers. The price is \$40.