

Ronald LABELLE, *Acadian Life in Chezzetcook* (Lawrencetown Beach, N.S., Pottersfield Press, 1995, 96 p.). Judith HOEGG RYAN, *The Birthplace of New Scotland: An Illustrated History of Pictou County, Canada's Cradle of Industry* (Halifax, Formac Publishing, 1995, 128 p.)

Studies of Acadian life in Nova Scotia have tended to concentrate on the larger Acadian communities, and especially on those where French persists as the language of daily life up to the present. For example, the tiny community of Chezzetcook, about 30 kilometers east of Halifax, received virtually no scholarly attention until it was included in a research project of the Centre d'études acadiennes in the early 1980s. Ronald Labelle was fascinated by this unique community and decided to continue his research there, interviewing many members of the community, including the surviving francophones. The resulting study, *La vie acadienne à Chezzetcook* was published in 1991, and now appears in the present well illustrated English version.

In comparison with other larger Acadian communities, the survival in Chezzetcook of Acadian language and culture well into the twentieth century seems extraordinary. Settled in the late eighteenth century by a somewhat miscellaneous Acadian population, including prisoners captured following the Deportation, the community was in continuous contact with the surrounding non-Acadian settlements, in frequent contact with Halifax, and separated by a considerable distance from other Acadian centres. Yet despite this, it maintained its distinctive culture, assimilating newcomers such as the Murphys and the Fergusons, rather than being assimilated by them. So distinctive, in fact, was the culture that it attracted the notice of nineteenth-century travellers, and earned for the community the nickname Chizzencookers although the term was, of course, generally used disparagingly.

What is clear from the oral testimony quoted by Labelle is that until fairly recently the people of Chezzetcook viewed themselves as a single and integral community, existing in a state of friendliness and often great cooperation with neighbouring communities, but traditionally separate from them. That this community integrity was to a large degree necessary for survival is implicit in the many details of the chapters, "Making a Living" and "Folkways." The agricultural land of West Chezzetcook and Grand-Désert, combined with the fishing industry, could provide a reasonable living, but never a wealthy one. In the end, the gradual failure of these

traditional occupations to provide sufficient support for the community, and the increasing necessity for individuals to move away in search of work, may well have been more important factors leading to the loss of the French language than the official imposition of English in bureaucracy and education. As Labelle comments, the men who left in the late 19th century to work in the factories of Portland, Maine, returned speaking English. The same can be said of the young girls who went to work as servants in Halifax. Significantly, these workers also brought back with them the possibility of economic prosperity, if elsewhere and in another language. Observations made by Labelle's informants on rum-running in the 1920s suggest that the tension between "us" and "them" is an economic rather than a linguistic one: it is between the relatively poor inhabitants of Chezzetcook and the bootleggers in their Cadillacs, rather than between French and English.

Acadian Life in Chezzetcook is an excellent study of a community whose traditional culture is fast disappearing now under a tidal wave of suburbanization. It seems very unlikely that the Acadian features of Chezzetcook will remain distinctive for much longer, especially in view of its neglect by provincial Acadian organizations. Labelle's analysis, and in particular the many interviews quoted by him make for compelling reading, with the assurance in the background of a fitting memorial of oral testimony in the Ronald Labelle Collection at the Centre d'études acadiennes.

In contrast, *The Birthplace of New Scotland* provides a different kind of history altogether. Briefly covering the early history of the Pictou area of Nova Scotia up to the end of the eighteenth century, it concentrates mainly on various developments in the county during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The presentation is chronological and factual, providing many details of life in the industrial centres of Pictou County, but little in the way of analysis. That many of the early settlers were of Scottish origin is evident from the immigration details given, as well as from the obviously Scottish names, but it is not clear why this matters in this particular discussion. In addition, while the discussion of industrial development in Pictou County itself is relatively thorough, its relationship to industrial development in the rest of Canada, and its role as a "Cradle" are not really presented at all.

The justification for this work lies in its illustrations. Paintings and photographs from the early nineteenth century onwards are reproduced in lavish detail, generally providing a much clearer and more vibrant notion of

Pictou life than does the supporting text. For most interested readers, who could not possibly accumulate such a collection themselves, the illustrations may prove invaluable, and in themselves make the book a worthwhile acquisition.

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