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## The French-Canadian Heritage in New England

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## REVIEWS IN MAINE HISTORY

her transcriptions of conversations with the captain and others evoke the character of the individuals and the lives they led.

Description of 1880s sailing practices fill several diary passages. Two of note are rounding Cape Horn and the route taken in approaching San Francisco. While passing around Cape Horn, Miss Gould elucidates the problems faced in conducting simple activities such as eating. Approaching San Francisco was similarly complicated. Instead of sailing directly to the harbor, the *Berlin* chose an elaborate route extending to the longitude of the Hawaiian Islands and then to a latitude north of San Francisco. The captain's purposes for each leg of this sailing maneuver are given. Maud Gould's diary ends August 25, 1887, for no reason other than the author was apparently tired of the voyage. The *Berlin* docked September 5, 1887.

Penny has done a fine job in making this diary available. In addition to the aforementioned criticism, Penny does not provide us with an indication of where the original diary is located. Nevertheless, she has added to our knowledge of ship-board life in the year 1887. It is well worth a first reading and probably a second for the information in Maud Gould's diary.

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*The French-Canadian Heritage in New England.* By Gerard J. Brault. (Hanover, N.H., and Montreal: University Press of New England and McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986. Pp. xiii, 282, \$25. Paper. \$12.95.)

On the back cover, publishers of this book have indicated that it is a contribution to Franco-American studies and to social history. Herein lie both the strengths and weaknesses of *The French-Canadian Heritage in New England*.

For his contribution to Franco-American studies, Gerard Brault deserves commendation. This is the first volume since Robert Rumilly's *Histoire des Franco-Américains*, published in 1958, that treats Franco-Americans as the subject of a general survey. And because Brault has chosen to write in English, the authors of future American history textbooks will find it possible to include more than a few sentences about this important immigrant group. As the 665 endnotes and twenty-three-page bibliography attest, Brault has read most of what has been written on Franco-Americans.

Brault describes the evolution of Franco-Americans from the immigration period beginning in the late nineteenth century through the institutional flowering in the 1920-1960 period, and ends with an assessment of the contemporary situation. As is common in ethnic studies, the author starts his story with a description of "the roots of Franco-American culture," namely, a look at Quebec peasant society. Brault adds an innovative touch by including a chapter on his own family history, which illustrates the experiences of generations of French Canadians and Acadians since the founding of New France. This chapter provides a fine model for genealogists and family historians, who too often merely compile lists of names and places.

From Quebecois housing and food patterns to the dominant conservative ideology, from newspapers to celebrities, from the many problems with the Irish-controlled Catholic hierarchy to the story of Assumption College, from the adoption of a Franco-American flag to federal subsidies in bilingual education, not much is lacking in Brault's description. The book offers something for everybody, from the Franco-American tracing family roots to the high school student looking for information about Franco-American history and life.

But this survey of "la Franco-Américaine" can hardly be considered social history. The author provides no interpretive framework, choosing instead to "let the facts speak for themselves" (p. xi), as though selecting and organizing facts could be absolutely objective. Biases emerge. For instance, Brault's

decision to devote ten pages to folklore and barely one to the important Sentinelle Affair mythicizes the Franco-American experience and minimizes the divisions within the group. Still, this eclectic approach leaves the impression that the author had difficulty weighing divergent interpretations.

The first chapter, "The Roots of Franco-American Culture," contains extensive descriptions of architecture, furniture, and clothing patterns, the religious calendar, the stages of life, and folklore. Despite the narrative weight of these details, Brault does not effectively argue their significance. Certainly material conditions played an equal or larger role in shaping French-Canadian attitudes in New England.

It would be difficult to use *The French-Canadian Heritage* as a college text, since its organization manifests the very weaknesses one hopes students will learn to transcend: lack of criteria in selecting sources, little distinction between trivial and significant facts, no strong theme giving unity and meaning. It is unfortunate that such criticism must be leveled at the first contemporary survey of Franco-American history. Brault's attempt is honest and his work will be helpful in many ways. Even the specialist will find a good deal of useful material in the information contained in the book. It is encouraging to see two prestigious presses lending their support in the relatively undeveloped area of Franco-American studies. Yet it is precisely from such presses that we should expect the editorial standards that would have resulted in a better book. The first synthesis of Franco-American history still awaits its author.

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