

# THE ANGLO-NORMANS



## IN EASTERN CANADA

Yves Frenette

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## THE CHANNEL ISLANDS

Located in the English Channel between the Brittany and Cherbourg peninsulas, the Channel Islands cover 194 km<sup>2</sup> and include four main islands: Jersey, Guernsey, Sark and Alderney, each with its distinctive features but sharing a common history and a lack of natural resources. On the fringes of the Roman Empire, these small islands were converted to Christianity by Breton saints prior to the Viking invasions. In 933, the Duke of Normandy, William I, annexed the Islands and placed them under feudal rule. When William II of Normandy became King of England in 1066, the Islands, French by geography and Norman by custom, tradition and language, became subject to the English Crown. Since then, the Channel Islands have been a dependency of the United Kingdom while remaining separate from it. They are governed by their own laws and customs, and administered by two governments (bailiwicks): Jersey and Guernsey. In 1990, the Channel Islands population was 143,683.

Despite its subjection to the British Crown, ties with Normandy survived, especially through migratory movements in both directions. Jersey and Guernsey, the two largest islands in the Channel archipelago, became home to thousands of French political and religious refugees, as well as seasonal and permanent workers. In addition to the Norman and French influence, an English influence spread out from the towns and grew as the years passed and means of communication became more sophisticated. In the 20th century, English became predominant in the Islands, gradually replacing both French, the language of the elite, and Norman, the idiom of the popular classes that contained many expressions borrowed from English, as well as words of Scandinavian and French derivation. Anglicanism is the Islands' official religion, although other forms of Protestantism and Catholicism are also practiced.

Early on, the Anglo-Normans became adept at protecting their islands from the long and almost relentless military conflicts between France and England. Economically, they used their geographical position to good advantage. By the 16th century, Jersey and Guernsey prospered through their semi-official status as warehouses for French and English trade goods, through their legal and illegal trade, and through their involvement in the commercial adventures of the New World's two colonizing countries. Increasingly, the Channel Islands' economy relied on the sea: fishing, shipping, contraband and piracy. Guernsey Islanders were particularly active in the latter two activities. They never recovered from the English government's abolition of contraband in 1807. Their neighbours and rivals on the Island of Jersey, however, prospered through the North American fisheries which, beginning in 1730, became the driving force of Jersey's economy.

## TOWARD "NEW FOUND LANDS," 1500-1763

According to the oral history of the Channel Islands, Jersey Islanders were among the first seafarers and fishermen to discover the rich fisheries of the Gulf of St. Lawrence; one Guernsey Islander is said to have served on Jacques Cartier's crew during his first voyage to Canada in 1534. Although these claims cannot be verified, there is no question that Anglo-Normans were early comers to the fishing banks of Newfoundland, the oldest written record dating back to 1591. Nine years later, the importance of the North American fishery grew when the new Governor of Jersey, Sir Walter Raleigh, encouraged Island merchants to equip their ships for the new lands. In the mid-17th century, the Jersey Estates (the Island's legislative assembly) complained bitterly of the Island's vulnerable military position caused by the absence of the many men who spent the fishing season in the New World. To exercise a modicum of control, the Governor thereafter issued licenses to those leaving. In 1713, the French departure from the southern coast of Newfoundland, following the Treaty of Utrecht, led to an expansion of Channel Islands trade in the region. In 1731, Jersey firms employed seventeen ships and 1,500 men in eastern Canada, a figure that excludes the many Jersey Islanders hired by outfitters from Guernsey, England and France. In 1765, Anglo-Normans comprised ten percent of fishermen in Newfoundland where a worker could earn as much as twenty pounds a season, compared to three pounds at home.

Ships from Jersey and Guernsey, like ships from France and England, would leave in the spring and return in time to allow the "terreneufions," as they were called in Norman patois, to harvest their crops in the fall. Some had to stay behind to care for the facilities over winter and prepare for the next fishing season, thereby tentatively laying the bases for permanent settlement. Though far fewer in number than the English and Irish, Anglo-Normans comprised the third largest group of Newfoundland pioneers. They settled around fishing posts in Trinity, Bonavista and Conception bays, where they cornered a major portion of the cod fishery. In Anglo-Norman tradition, they built their dwellings and stores of stone with roofs painted red. In 1765, one-third of the 942 Anglo-Normans who worked in Newfoundland were settlers.

As the British conquest of Canada progressed, Jersey merchants moved westward. In 1749, Joshua Mauger, whose family had been engaged in fishing and trade in the New World for many generations, and who had himself set up a base of operations in the fortified town of Louisbourg two years before, moved to Halifax where his business and real estate ventures quickly made him one of the most prominent figures in the emerging colony. Mauger returned to England in 1760 and became a Member of Great Britain's Parliament, wielding considerable influence, particularly in North American affairs.

## THE CREATION OF SEDENTARY FISHERIES, 1763-1820

Many Anglo-Normans came to Canada as officers and seamen during the Seven Years' War and the War of 1812. Others were recruited by large landowners, like the seventy-three Guernsey Islanders who founded Guernsey Cove on the southern shore of Prince Edward Island around 1805. However, these were exceptions. It was fishing and its related trade activity that continued to attract Anglo-Normans to eastern Canada after the Conquest. Each year, fifty or so Jersey vessels manned by 2,500 men fished off the coast of Canada, considered by many Jersey Islanders to be a distant extension of their own island. When bread shortages caused riots in Jersey during the winter of 1769-70, the English authorities were quick to blame an agricultural crisis resulting from "the great number of hands yearly employed in the Newfoundland trade."

After the Conquest, many Anglo-Norman firms engaged in the Newfoundland fishery. Carteret and Priault, DeQuetteville, Nicolle & Co., LeMesurier, DeGruchy and many other business firms competed with English and French companies from the Island. As established fishing centres became overcrowded, some firms moved their operations to Labrador and the lower north shore of the St. Lawrence. After the Treaty of Versailles was signed (1763), excluding British subjects from the former French coast of Newfoundland, other companies followed suit. Each summer, fishing drew a thousand Jersey, English, Acadian and French-Canadian workers to the northern Gulf shores.

In the third quarter of the 18th century, some Anglo-Norman firms evolved into sedentary fisheries, establishing permanent posts and recruiting fishermen who would settle in the area for good. Skilled labour came from the Channel Islands and England. Most of these workers eventually returned home, but a few settled in Labrador and Newfoundland. At the turn of the 19th century, Philip Messervy established a trading and fishing post in Newfoundland, at St. George's Bay. First he recruited a few fellow Jersey Islanders, including family members. Messervy purchased their catch and in exchange supplied them with goods, imitating in this respect the business methods of French and English merchants. Over the years, the Messervy clientele grew and the family became front-ranking merchants.

From their base in Newfoundland, Anglo-Normans moved quickly into the Gulf of St. Lawrence after Canada's final cession to England in 1763, taking advantage of their knowledge of French to form economic ties with the Acadians. Anglo-Norman merchants settled on Cape Breton Island, in the Gaspé region and New Brunswick. Among them, the brothers Philip, Jacques (John) and Charles Robin established Robin, Pison and Company of Isle Madame in 1765 and the John Robin and Co. soon after. At first, these businesses enlisted the services of seasonal Jersey fishermen, but quickly transformed their Arichat trading counter, on Cape Breton Island, into a sedentary fishery post. To do so, they recruited Acadian refugees newly settled on St. Pierre Island (Saint-Pierre and Miquelon). In 1766, the youngest Robin brother, Charles, explored Chaleur Bay and established trade relations with the Acadian and aboriginal peoples, and with other traders who

had arrived earlier. Charles returned the following year with Jersey fishermen and, for six weeks, did business on both shores of Chaleur Bay, establishing a small post on the Paspébiac sand bar which was destined to become the company's headquarters. Charles traded with the Acadians, the Micmacs and seasonal fishermen from New England — salt, liquor and other commodities were exchanged for fish, furs and fresh meat. He developed a clientele by advancing the fishermen goods that they would reimburse with the next year's catch. In the years that followed, this practice enabled him to create a market by regularly increasing the size of his clientele. In 1774, the Robin brothers recruited a hundred or so Acadian deportees from Brittany and settled them in Chaleur Bay, Isle Madame and Canso (Nova Scotia). In constant contact with Jersey Island, and exploiting the Anglo-Normans' long experience in the Newfoundland fishery, the Robin brothers realized the many advantages of permanent establishments. Unlike their competitors, they could obtain fish from local fishermen early in the spring.

The American War of Independence temporarily halted the Robin brothers' activities. On their return to eastern Canada at the end of the conflict, they established two new companies, the Philip Robin Co. and the Charles Robin Co., and expanded their clientele of fishermen, the key to their success. They recruited the first Acadians to Chéticamp, on the north shore of Cape Breton Island, where they had managed a seasonal establishment since 1770. The fishermen had to be persuaded to stay in the area and to sell the Robin brothers all of their catch at the lowest possible price. The Jersey system relied heavily on the dependency of fishermen-clients. The company provided them with merchandise on credit throughout the year, and was repaid in fish at the end of the fishing season. Since the high price of supplies exceeded the return on their fish, the fishermen ended the season in debt, and were practically forced to work for the same company the following year.

Money and provisions were advanced to the fishermen in exchange for certain guarantees. To secure these guarantees, Anglo-Norman merchants registered debt instruments and mortgages on the fishermen's lots in an amount equal to the amount of merchandise advanced. As a result, many fishermen-clients were forced to mortgage or sell their operations following one or more consecutive seasons of poor catches. Foreclosures also took place. In some communities, fishermen were extremely dependent on the companies. To ease their burden of debt, more than a few would have to work for the Jersey Islanders in winter, cutting and hauling wood, building and repairing boats, or manufacturing barrels. Some would even have to toil on one of the Robin Company boats.

However, accumulating debt was not always negative, and the best producers were often the most indebted, while others never or very rarely incurred debt. In some places, Anglo-Norman companies were unable to take control of independent fishermen who sold their catch to the merchant of their choosing, without taking on debt. Indeed, coasting merchants had always given Anglo-Norman merchants competition by stealing their clients. In the second half of the 19th century, the growing number of permanent or seasonal merchants restricted the Anglo-Norman firms' freedom of action by forcing them to pay better wages, offer a

better price for the fish, give more generous advances and ask a lower price for their merchandise.

To maximize their profits, Anglo-Norman companies used dubious means. When grading the cod, they would require the fishermen to supply a few extra pounds per hundredweight if their fish were poorly dried and mouldy. They also took advantage of their clients' illiteracy. When clients came to the company store to settle their debts, a clerk read them their account outloud, interpreting it as he pleased. Trilingual, the clerks conversed among themselves in Norman patois so English- or French-speaking clients could not understand them.

The outbreak of the revolutionary wars at the end of the 18th century disrupted the Anglo-Norman companies' operations. The Robin brothers had to deal with the shortage of Jersey labour caused by military conscription. Crews were difficult to assemble, and there was always a shortage of fishermen. In 1800, even inexperienced men were enlisted, which prompted Charles, who was responsible for operations in the Gaspé, to resort to hiring seasonal French-Canadians from the south shore of the St. Lawrence, east of Quebec City. The introduction of this practice clearly illustrates the Robins' flexibility and good judgement. In Jersey, they avoided as much as possible people such as sailors and craftsmen with experience in the Canadian fisheries. Instead, they chose people from the most rural parishes of the island, who were relatively unfamiliar with salaried work. They also demonstrated considerable skill in their relations with fishermen-clients. Dealing and socializing with them in French, Charles used various strategies to enhance his image in their eyes. "Call this boat the Saint-Pierre," he apparently wrote to a clerk in 1783, "after the patron saint of fishermen. The settlers identify with the name, and it will please them... We must not break with convention... The fishermen have their habits; wait until they abandon them by choice, before they come around to accepting ours. Do not fault them. When called to live among them, let us generously make the necessary sacrifices to have them forget that they are the conquered and we the conquerors ... Any attitude to the contrary would distance them from us; and then, where would they go, poor as they are? Should this situation not inspire our deepest commiseration for them?" (translation)

Charles Robin enlisted the influence of political authorities. He had no difficulty putting pressure on the Lieutenant-Governors of the Gaspé peninsula. The first incumbent of this position, Nicholas Cox, took up his duties in 1777 while deeply in debt to Charles. His successor, Francis LeMaistre, was a Jersey native and also a friend of the family. With their help, Charles had a customs office opened near his headquarters in Paspébiac and acquired vast stretches of land as well as strategically located shoreline property. He was also commissioned on various occasions to act as judge or investigator, positions he filled to protect his own interests. Furthermore, he helped elect politicians to the Legislative Assembly of Lower Canada who would pander to his interests and unscrupulously undermine his opponents. At the turn of the 19th century, he was one of the most powerful figures in eastern Canada. However, his influence had limits. For example, he was never successful in obtaining export bonuses, or an exemption of

duties on imported goods, advantages provided to the fishing industry in other colonies. Sometimes, authorities even seized his cargo for failing to comply with customs regulations.

Charles returned to Jersey in 1802 as peace dawned on the Atlantic horizon; he guided the fortunes of Charles Robin & Co. until his retirement in 1808. Having no children, he left his nephews a company that was becoming the commercial giant of the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

During this era, the competitors of Charles Robin Co. on the shores of the Gaspé included small Anglo-Norman merchants, especially those from Guernsey, such as Helier Bonamy and Nicholas LeMesurier in Gaspé Bay. These two men had settled in the region with their families and approximately fifty workers shortly after 1763. They, too, left the Gaspé during the American War of Independence. After the conflict, their firm expanded; however, like many others, they were unable to compete with the larger companies, notably that of the Janvrin brothers, who bought them out in 1792. The Bonamy and LeMesurier families remained in Gaspé Bay where they were joined by other small fish merchants from Guernsey. These dealers, as they were called, became clients of the Janvrin firm that bought their cod and supplied them with workers and provisions. These small merchants acted as intermediaries between the fishermen and the large trading company. They also hunted whales. Some of them, like the Simon family of Indian Cove, operated flour and saw mills. With the Jersey fishermen brought by the Janvrin company, the Guernsey Islanders established small Protestant communities whose geographic isolation and endogamy preserved their ethnic identity, including their Norman patois that contrasted sharply to Acadian and Quebec French.

The brothers Francis and Philip Janvrin established their company in Arichat in 1783 where they soon overshadowed the Robin brothers in importance. At the same time, the Janvrin brothers set up a small fishing operation in the Magdalen Islands. In 1789, they expanded into the Gaspé, where they soon had some 200 clients and several trading counters. Their ships also sailed the shores of New Brunswick. For approximately fifty years, the Janvrin brothers held shares in the Robin company and were involved in other Anglo-Norman operations, notably that of Carteret Priaulx. They signed agreements with Guernsey companies who promised not to fish in Cape Breton or Gaspé Bay if the Janvrins agreed to stay out of Newfoundland waters. In 1820, the Janvrin brothers were the largest Jersey Island outfitters. They gradually disposed of their fishing operations, however, to concentrate almost exclusively on banking and financial activities by the mid 19th-century.

## THE JERSEY ERA, 1820-1870

Anglo-Norman companies, especially those from Jersey, dominated the maritime economy of the Gulf of St. Lawrence in the 19th century. Aldo Brochet inventoried no less than forty-four of them between 1760 and 1926, a conservative figure that excludes Newfoundland companies. In Gaspé Bay alone, ten of the twenty merchants operating in 1862 were Anglo-Normans. This was the golden age of Anglo-Norman companies. They operated in Newfoundland, Cape Breton Island, Gaspé Peninsula, New Brunswick, the lower north shore of the St. Lawrence and Labrador. They maximized their profits by developing many fishing areas, all based on the same system of credit-dependency among fishermen-clients. This allowed them to offset the losses or shortfalls of one region with the profits earned in another. On the whole, Anglo-Norman firms employed no less than 4,000 people, one-quarter of them from Jersey and, to a lesser extent, from Guernsey.

While the mainstay of production was dried cod, the companies also exported complementary products as opportunities and needs allowed: other fish, oils, fur and lumber. Italy, Spain, Portugal, Brazil and the British Caribbean were their primary markets, but eastern Canadian cod was also sold in the United States, Jersey, England, as well as domestically. From these markets, other products were imported and were sold to the fishermen: rum, sugar, molasses, fruit, salt and manufactured goods.

Charles Robin & Co. had the most extensive interests in the Gulf. From its headquarters and main port of shipment in Paspébiac, it dealt with more fishermen-clients than its competitors. In addition to its outposts in the Gaspé, the firm operated on the eastern coast of New Brunswick, on Cape Breton Island, and on the lower north shore of the St. Lawrence. As the largest exporter of fish in eastern Canada, its cod production climbed from 27,000 to 57,000 hundredweight between 1828 and 1865, not including other fish and oil. It employed 750 people, including approximately sixty clerks and craftsmen. It capitalized on favourable economic circumstances and perfected the system introduced by its founder. The company's cod was valued for its high quality achieved through careful preparation and packaging. On international markets, the company also benefited from other Robin family members who had established import-export companies. As a result, Charles Robin & Co. controlled every aspect of dried cod production, from harvesting to sales, including financing and shipbuilding. Indeed, it operated one of eastern Canada's largest shipyards.

Another reflection of the company's importance is the fact that it launched the careers of most other Anglo-Norman merchants. Among the most important, William Fruing in 1832, John LeBoutillier in 1833, LeBoutillier Bros. in 1838 and, later, John Fauvel, and John and Elias Collas. Repeatedly, observers correctly noted the intricate business and family ties among the Jersey merchants. The Robins were related by marriage to the Pipons and DeCarterets, and the Janvrins had ties to these three merchant families, as well as to the DeQuettevilles. Around 1860, the Robin and Janvrin firms combined their financial activities. Matrimonial alliances

were also common in eastern Canada. John LeBoutillier married the daughter of Philip Robin Jr., nephew of Charles, and one of his sons married the daughter of John Fauvel.

As an old Jersey adage goes, "There are no cousins in Newfoundland" (translation). In other words, old island rivalries found their way to the New World. The DeGruchys, enemies of the Robins for generations, invested in many Newfoundland cod-fishing companies and became the second largest Anglo-Norman firm in North America, even aspiring to compete with the Robin family in the Gaspé. The animosity between these two giants echoes in Jersey's memory to this day. Some former clerks of the Robin firm tried to make inroads into the very heart of the Robin commercial empire. Brothers David, Amy and Edward LeBoutillier set up operations near the Robin headquarters in Paspébiac, and mounted a fierce competition and a rivalry that extended to the political level. The trade war between Jersey and Guernsey Islanders was equally fierce, since, they too brought their age-old animosity to Canadian shores.

Having built their companies after long experience on the banks and coasts of Newfoundland, Anglo-Norman businessmen at the turn of the 19th century, led by Charles Robin, in turn provided a model to their countrymen who set up sedentary fishing outposts. These establishments could be enormous. In Arichat and Chéticamp, on Cape Breton Island and in Paspébiac, Percé and Grande-Rivière in the Gaspé peninsula, Jersey merchants owned vast domains covering several hundred acres, with woodlands and dozens of buildings where they stored large quantities of dried cod as well as tackle, provisions, tools, hardware, dried goods, clothing, shoes and furniture. The manager lived in a dwelling set high on a hill where he could survey everything happening on land and sea. The establishment could also include a bakery, a farm, a shipyard and a public house. While small businessmen could not provide all of these amenities, the idea was the same: as much self-sufficiency as possible.

The division of labour was highly sophisticated in the larger establishments. Almost all skilled labourers, journeymen and seamen came from the Channel Islands. Most were farmers or farm workers whose wives and children looked after the farm in their absence. These men left Jersey after the spring communion and, like their forebears, hoped to return in time for the harvest. Some fished and worked as boatswains, but most laboured eleven hours a day on the beach as cod gutters and salters. The only Jersey Islanders employed as coastal fishermen were crew members of ships assigned to fish in the offseason.

The companies recruited their clerks from Jersey schools, where the most promising teenagers had already begun to receive training that they would complete on the job. These young people had to sign on for five years, and they worked very hard. Discipline was firm and meticulous. Even dress and diet were governed by rules. Those caught frequenting taverns or other "dens of iniquity" were dealt with harshly. After a few years of service to a company, the young Jersey Islander became chief clerk or manager at a small outpost. Unless he returned to Jersey upon

completion of his first or second contract, he would set up home in Canada around the age of 28 or 29, his station allowing him to marry a young girl from a good Protestant family. The companies preferred to hire bachelors, but they recognized that marriage secured stability. Only after long years of absolute loyalty, despite mediocre remuneration, could a Jersey employee aspire to become manager of large establishment.

Until 1840, Charles Robin & Co. which exercised a virtual trade monopoly, was able to extend almost complete control over Anglo-Norman immigration to Chaleur Bay. However, the company did not seem openly to discourage its employees from settling on the coast at the end of their contract. Anglo-Normans settled in the Gaspé and New Brunswick under its auspices. Even families that immigrated voluntarily were probably attracted by the availability of credit and the assurance of selling their cod to the company. However, around the middle of the century, as rival Anglo-Norman firms entered the scene, the company began losing control over immigration and its officials began complaining about the presence of Jersey riff-raff in eastern Canada.

The Anglo-Normans' contribution to the settlement of Newfoundland and the Gulf region is not numerically significant. In 1871, the four provinces that first formed the new Dominion included only 852 natives of Jersey and Guernsey. Even in coastal Gaspé, the 397 Anglo-Normans accounted for only 1.3 percent of the population. The only large concentrations of Anglo-Normans in eastern Canada lived in Arichat and Paspébiac, headquarters of the major fishing companies. Grande-Grave and Mal-Bay, in the Gaspé, were the only localities where Anglo-Norman immigrants comprised a majority of the population.

Relations between Anglo-Norman merchants and the local population were largely shaped by the commercial system that, as mentioned earlier, relied on the dependency of fishermen-clients. However, the fishermen were not duped, as revealed in an old song sung by Chéticamp's Acadians, a community whose isolation made it more vulnerable to the Robin company's control: "When you catch the fish, they are gentle as lambs. When you go to their shop, they are fierce as lions... You have no spirit. The Jerseyans tell you that you have no spirit. In the spring they come with their rotten biscuit."(translation) Derision sometimes gave way to resistance. Catholic fishermen refused to fish during major religious holidays. One year, in Blanc-Sablon, on the lower north shore, Gaspé fishermen recruited by the DeQuetteville firm demanded to return home three weeks earlier than planned. They refused to continue fishing, even when their rations were reduced to bread and water. During the 1820s and 1830s, fishermen from Isle Madame and Grande-Rivière retaliated against legal action taken against them by the Robin Company. Isle Madame fishermen threatened to burn the company's establishment. In Grande-Rivière, they killed the company's dog, which frightened the manager into confining himself to home.

Acadians and French-Canadians were not alone in their grievances against the Jersey firms. Anglo-Norman fishermen and small merchants also complained about

the greediness of Jersey agents and outfitters. When wronged, they wasted no time in taking them to court.

The economic power of the Jersey merchants combined with political and social power. In Newfoundland, the LeMesuriers were a prominent family whose members filled many political and administrative positions. The same was true of the Bourinot family in Cape Breton. John George was a member of the Nova Scotia Legislature from 1859 to 1867, and a Senator from 1867 until his death in 1884. From his base on Isle Madame, Isaac LeVesconte carried on a political career at the provincial and federal levels. In the Gaspé, John Gosset, nephew of Philip Robin Jr. and the company's senior manager in Canada, was elected to political office, like David and John LeBoutillier, the latter was also a member of Canada's Legislative Council in 1867. In New Brunswick, Joshua Alexandre, Fruing company manager in Shippagan, sat in the provincial Legislature from 1842 to 1846. To have "their" men elected, the companies would pressure the dealers and fishermen, sometimes with threats and violence.

The Anglo-Normans also dominated the local scene, wielding an influence far beyond their faint demographic importance, but clearly demonstrating their social standing. Many of them owned small fishing operations or a business and, although not wealthy, their standard of living surpassed that of the rest of the population. In 1871, the small group of notables from Griffon Cove, to the north of Gaspé Bay, included four Jersey Islanders, among them the mayor and an alderman. Elsewhere, they served as sheriffs, customs officers, justices of the peace, school commissioners, municipal and school board secretaries, postmasters and telegraph operators. They were often selected to serve as jurors. In Mal-Bay, one small Protestant merchant, Guillaume Girard, even became head churchwarden of the Catholic parish. Anglo-Normans seem to have put their limited education to good use in dealing with generally illiterate populations.

Themselves Protestant, Anglo-Norman merchants looked down on the "Papists" in their midst. Whenever possible, Charles Robin & Co. hired no Catholics except as fishermen. To prevent their workers and apprentices from becoming too familiar with the local populations, the company moved them from one establishment to another after brief assignments. When an Anglo-Norman employee married a Catholic woman, he had to leave the company and risk his parents' disfavour. This practice also applied to Robin family members. When Philip Jr., nephew and heir of Charles, married Marthe Arbour in 1811, with whom he already had two children, the Robin family refused to acknowledge the union and no favours were shown to the children who, raised in the Catholic faith, were disinherited. Later, Philip Jr. refused to acknowledge Marthe as his wife. Other companies hired Catholics but Jersey Islanders employed by the Fruing Company and suspected of succumbing to Catholicism were sent back to their native island. Aware of the Church's power, the companies nevertheless maintained cordial relations with the clergy. Managers entertained missionaries in their homes and treated them with considerable respect. In the absence of a place of worship, they sometimes offered their homes for the celebration of mass. The merchants and

their managers generously helped build and decorate Catholic churches, and also loosened their purse strings at parish bazaars. However, an Anglican or Catholic missionary would occasionally complain about some managers' lack of cooperation.

Relations between Anglo-Norman immigrants and other segments of the population were generally marked by tolerance, with only rare outbreaks of violence. In communities where several ethnic groups lived side by side, and where Anglo-Norman settlers were too few to comprise a community, they mingled with their neighbours. They shared the same trade (fishing), bought goods from the same stores and even danced at the same weddings. Because Anglo-Norman women were scarce in eastern Canada, Jersey and Guernsey immigrants most often chose spouses outside their ethnic group to avoid marriage between relatives. Almost invariably, the Jersey settler was assimilated. On Old Fort Island, the Robin family continued to practice its Anglican faith but adopted the English language, like most of their fellow countrymen in Newfoundland. Those surrounded by Irish or Acadian peoples became Catholic, especially when the services of Protestant missionaries were unavailable.

In almost all cases, their Anglo-Norman identity and patois had disappeared by the second generation. In some families, mixed marriages created a complex lineage. Pierre LeMoignan, for example, was born in Jersey in 1816 and settled in the Gaspé at fourteen years of age, working as a carpenter and clerk for the Robin company. In 1837, he married a French-Canadian woman from Grande-Rivière, who became the mother of his twelve children. These children and their descendants variously married Jersey Islanders, descendants of American Loyalists, Irish, French Canadians and Acadians. Even though Anglo-Normans comprised a majority of the population in mixed religious communities like Mal-Bay in the Gaspé, their preference for Protestant wives led them to assimilate with anglophones. Undoubtedly, this preference was also related to the socio-political and socio-economic environment in which the English language dominated.

## **THE DECLINE, 1870-1930**

In 1870, the Robin empire had acquired over \$1 million in capital. However, like other Anglo-Norman companies, the firm was soon to encounter serious problems. It continued to operate by methods that, while tried and true, had outlasted their usefulness in the changing world of the late 19th century. The company continued to practice traditional fishing using a large number of hands and outdated techniques, such as line fishing, sail boats and row boats. It frowned upon nets with trawls and opposed the Norwegian lure, perhaps because these new techniques could increase a fisherman's catch, making him more independent. The arrival of steamships and rail transport was also a blow to Anglo-Norman firms because they fuelled competition. Advances in the refrigeration industry made it easier to ship fresh products, and dried cod lost its market appeal. It was also more difficult to satisfy the fishermen-clients who asked for an increasing variety of consumer

goods. This demand helped increase the amount of goods in circulation, sorely testing the transportation infrastructure and the companies' ability to integrate at no extra cost an ever growing number of producers within an ever more extensive area. The profits from import-export operations declined. Similarly, it was becoming difficult to balance "good" as opposed to "bad" debts. The problem was not new, but it grew in proportion to competition. Fearing desertion by their fishermen-clients, the companies gave credit to insolvent persons, and raised the costs of production while lowering consumer prices, all this in an unfavourable international environment.

Labrador firms were the first to encounter problems in the late 1860s. They folded in 1873 following the collapse of two Jersey banks, the Mercantile and the Joint Stock. In Newfoundland, the Jersey firms launched a withdrawal strategy. They sold a large portion of their facilities and equipment, but were still unable to resist the tide of circumstance. In 1886, the collapse of the Jersey Commercial Bank toppled the foundations of eastern Canada's Anglo-Norman firms. DeGruchy and his associates in Newfoundland, and Charles Robin and LeBoutillier Bros. in the Gulf, went under. One by one, Anglo-Norman fishing companies disappeared, the largest joining forces with Canadian interests. Such was the case for the LeMesurier family, the LeBoutillier Bros. and even Charles Robin & Co. which, following several reorganizations, moved its headquarters from Jersey to Halifax in 1904, amalgamating two years later with the firms A.G. Jones and A.H. Whitman. The new entity operated under the name Robin, Jones & Whitman. From 1912 onward, it concentrated on the retail aspects of its business by establishing a chain of department stores.

Until the early 1930s, the remaining firms continued to recruit a small number of clerks, managers and skilled labourers from Jersey. Discipline slackened somewhat, and the companies encouraged managers' wives to join their husbands. This worked to the companies' advantage since the wives would cook and clean. However, managers continued to supervise their young apprentices very carefully. They had to abide by a 10 p.m. curfew, attend Sunday church services and abstain from frequenting public houses and other "places of evil." Offenders were punished by having their free time limited or by being transferred to remote outposts. If they showed excessive interest in a young Catholic girl, they were sent back home to Jersey at their own expense. At Robin, Jones & Whitman, employees' contracts were drafted according to century-old custom: "His said masters shall and will faithfully serve, their secrets keep, their lawful commands everywhere gladly obey, and diligently and carefully demean and behave himself towards them." Jersey clerks were held in such high esteem that Canadian companies in fields unrelated to fishing, such as the Price forestry company, began to recruit them. On the other hand, the fishing firms increasingly hired non-Anglo-Normans to manage small establishments and work as skilled labourers.

At the end of the 19th century and in the early 20th, relations between Anglo-Norman companies and local lay and religious elites soured as the latter began to assert their local and regional influence. Some merchants grew to despise the

Catholic clergy with its notions of temperance, agriculture, education and cooperative enterprises. The growing number of zealous priests gave the Catholic church better control. Gradually, the large Jersey firms even stopped selling liquor in their stores. In some places, the dispute centred on financial matters, the mortgages on parish property being held by the fishing companies. A good example of clerical activism was the priest at Chéticamp, Pierre Fiset, who made no effort to please the Jersey Islanders. When he was appointed parish priest in 1875, Fiset breached local custom by not visiting the Robin company manager. Instead, the manager had to make the visit, only to be told that the new priest would do everything in his power to rid the place of Jersey Islanders. At first, Fiset managed to prevent them from making his flock work on Sunday, and then arranged to have the fishermen purchase their boats rather than rent them from the company. In 1883, he entered into direct competition with the company by launching a fishing operation and a store. Later, he acquired a portion of its facilities and established a cooperative, forcing the Robin company to compromise. Fiset was a forerunner of the clerical activism of the 1920s, one notable example being the bishop of the new Gaspé diocese, François-Xavier Ross, "anxious to shake the yoke of the slave drivers" through the cooperative movement. While some priests were still conciliatory toward the companies, their numbers were dwindling.

The lay elites were also becoming more aggressive. The regional petty bourgeoisie used politics to limit the influence of company managers. Slowly, these managers lost their regional and local dominance. One telling example is the fact that William LeBoutillier-Fauvel, the grandson of Jersey businessmen and senior manager of LeBoutillier Bros., owed his election to the House of Commons in 1891 to the powerful Liberal organization mounted by the parish priest of Bonaventure, Napoléon Thivierge. But the elites were not alone in challenging the authority of Jersey companies. On at least two occasions, local populations revolted. In Chéticamp, in 1879, the forced evacuation of several families of squatters living on land owned by the Robin firm triggered a riot and the departure of the Jersey manager. Thirty years later, a popular uprising shook the small community of Rivière-au-Renard, in the Gaspé. Dissatisfied with the price offered by Jersey companies, local fishermen found another buyer who sent a schooner to collect their catch. But after dealings with the Jersey Islanders, the schooner left without a single cod on board. As a result, fifty or so fishermen showed up at the Fruing store and violence ensued. A clerk shot at a fisherman and the mob retaliated by turning on employees. At the companies' request, the federal government dispatched a frigate and two military detachments. Twenty-two fishermen were brought before the courts and sent to prison.

The incident shows that Anglo-Norman companies were still capable of defending themselves. The Fruing company could still have residents of Grande-Grave arrested for debt if they encouraged their neighbours to vote for candidates running against the company's favourite. During the First World War, Robin, Jones & Whitman's clerks still wielded enough influence to play an important role in military recruitment campaigns. A short time later, in cooperation with small,

struggling Anglo-Norman businessmen, the company managed significantly to weaken the Gaspé peninsula's first fishing cooperatives. They did this particularly by pressuring provincial politicians, as well as the man the Quebec government appointed in 1928 as its Maritime Superintendent, F.M. Gibault, who also happened to be a former Robin company clerk.

## THE ANGLO-NORMAN HERITAGE, 1930-1995

With few exceptions, Anglo-Norman interests had disappeared from eastern Canada in 1930. Robin, Jones & Whitman declined for half a century before finally closing shop in the 1980s. Beginning with the Great Depression, Anglo-Norman immigration to eastern Canada all but ceased. In fact, an unknown number of Jersey Islanders returned to their homeland or emigrated to other parts of Canada and to the United States. Some chose to stay and continued to work for Robin, Jones and Whitman who continued to assign management positions to English-assimilated Jersey Islanders or Jersey-Canadians, such as the LeBreton or Legros families, despite the company's Canadianization. As far as possible, these managers hired clerks of Jersey origin. While Catholics could not be excluded, they were still prevented from occupying management positions as late as 1942. And woe to any Jersey Islander who married a Catholic woman and converted to "papist" beliefs! He would lose his job and be ostracized from the tiny Anglo-Norman elite of eastern Canada. In addition, the last Robin managers were staunch supporters and defenders of their founder's memory, Charles Robin.

Many Anglo-Normans used their maritime business experience to establish small companies, particularly in the booming tourism industry. Around 1950, only a few dozen residents born in the Channel Islands remained in eastern Canada; a quarter century later, the group was on its way to extinction as a result of the Atlantic provinces' decline and the regionalization and ethnic renaissance among Francophones in eastern Canada. Having only preserved a few delightful expressions of their Norman patois, they were on the defensive. Collective memory and, to a certain extent, regional historiography focused on negative images of the "Robins," as Anglo-Normans in Acadia and the Gaspé peninsula are still called. They are blamed for holding back regional development and mercilessly exploiting poor fishermen reduced to slavery. In the emotionally-charged climate of recent decades, Anglo-Normans have been portrayed as the "damned English." But for each entrepreneur, there toiled hundreds of humble Anglo-Normans, patois-speaking or bilingual.

The memory of Anglo-Normans, however, survives only in eastern Canada. West of the Gaspé peninsula, they are unknown. For Quebecers, Ontarians or Albertans, "LeMoine" or "Mauger" are merely French-sounding names. Similarly, few tourists question the origin of place names like Jersey Cove in the Gaspé peninsula, Pointe Alexandre in New Brunswick, Robin's Island on Cape Breton Island, Jerseyville in Labrador or Guernsey Island in Newfoundland, and apart from

ethnologists or linguists, who could detect traces of the Norman patois in the language spoken by Paspébiac residents? Lastly, what Canadian would be able to link the names of John Bourinot, founder of the Royal Society of Canada, or General Brock, hero of the War of 1812, to the Channel Islands?

We can only hope that historical sites commemorating the Anglo-Normans' presence, in Grande-Grave at Forillon National Park and in Paspébiac, will help spread word of this ethnic group. Despite their small numbers, the Anglo-Normans played a decisive role in the social development of eastern Canada. In Newfoundland, Labrador, Cape Breton Island, the north shore of the St. Lawrence, the Gaspé and New Brunswick, their trade activities often led to permanent settlements, and helped shape societies that long relied on producing dried cod for their survival. To coin a delightful Jersey expression, Anglo-Normans left "the stamp of their bailiwick" on these regions.

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