

JEAN LECLERC. — *Le marquis de Denonville gouverneur de la Nouvelle-France 1685-1689*. Montréal: Fides, 1976.

First off it has to be stated that this work is not a biography of Denonville, nor is it a study of all aspects of his administration. The author treats only of military and diplomatic affairs during that four year period. They were, however, four very turbulent and significant years in the history of North America. New York and the Iroquois confederacy were contesting French control of the Great Lakes and the western fur trade, while the Canadians sought to drive the English out of Hudson Bay. In Europe the governments of Louis XIV and James II sought a peaceful settlement of their conflicting claims in America only to have their negotiations terminated by the Glorious Revolution in England and the outbreak of full scale hostilities.

It has also been a highly controversial period for historians. Up until some twenty-five years ago Denonville was pictured as a treacherous, inept bigot who undid the masterful work of Frontenac's first administration and who was replaced by the former governor just in the nick of time as disaster struck the colony. A revisionist biography of Frontenac challenged this interpretation and a few years later three articles appeared, two by the author of the work under review, on one of the more controversial episodes of Denonville's administration, the capture of a number of Iroquois some of whom were sent to serve in the French galleys. (*Revue d'Histoire de l'Amérique française*, décembre 1960, mars, juin 1961.) The interpretation of events in these works appear now to have gained general acceptance. Certainly Jean Leclerc has accepted the revisionist view of Frontenac's administration.

There is, then, little that is new in this work. Its value lies in the fact that the earlier revisionist accounts of events are placed in a broader context, and buttressed by much fresh detail. The author skilfully shows the interrelation of events in North America and Europe. In chapter IX there is an excellent account of the work of the Anglo-French committee that sought to reconcile the differences of the two empires in North America. The way that Denonville's firm stand against the aggressive policies of New York and his own aggressive policy in Hudson Bay caused the attitude of the British Whig faction to harden and strengthened the growing opposition to James II is succinctly explained. The wavering policy of Seignelay and the problems this created for Denonville are also made plain. The role of the Iroquois, an imperial power rivalling both the French and the English, is put in its proper context.

In this discussion of the intendant De Meulle's corrupt activities, that resulted in his dismissal, much new detail is provided, and also some on Frontenac's skilful politicking at the Court to obtain his reappointment as governor general. In some instances, however, the detail becomes excessive and there is too much unnecessary repetition from chapter to chapter. This is particularly true of chapter IV, *L'armée permanente*, which almost appears as though it had been intended for a different work. Yet it does contain an excellent description of the appalling conditions on the trans-Atlantic troopships of the period. Mention of the fact that Denonville shared an eight by thirteen foot cabin with nine members of his entourage is quite revealing. The description of Denonville's Seneca campaign would have benefitted from a trimming. It is almost an hour by hour account of the march into enemy territory. Similarly, a description of Niagara falls is hardly vital.

The author is clearly an admirer of Denonville, but there was much to admire in the man. His main difficulty was his honesty, his lack of the courtier's

wiles. The author also strives to be fair in his delineation of the characters of the other leading figures of the period. La Barre and Frontenac are treated very judiciously. In fact, the author leans a little backwards in his discussion of some of the latter's proclivities. More should have been said on Denonville's relations with Champigny.

Of nit to pick there is little. The statement (p. 100) that only nobles could hold commissions in the Troupes de la Marine is not true. The epidemic that struck La Barre's army at Fort Frontenac was almost certainly not malaria (p. 24). Medical opinion, based on the symptoms and description of the disease — *ague tierce* — is that it was Spanish influenza, the same disease that ravaged Europe at the end of the first World War. Frontenac's 1693 winter campaign against the Mohawks was not the success that it is here claimed to be (p. 176). It came very close to being a major disaster. The author appears, this once, to have accepted Frontenac's version of events at face value.

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NORMAND SÉGUIN, — *La conquête du sol au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Trois-Rivières, Les Éditions du Boréal Express, 1977.

Ce petit livre au titre ambitieux est en fait une monographie de la paroisse Notre-Dame d'Hébertville (Lac St-Jean). Mais Séguin a voulu donner à son étude, tant du point de vue de l'approche que des mécanismes révélés, un caractère exemplaire. Ce qu'il vise à atteindre à partir du cas d'Hébertville, c'est, raconte sa préfacière, à « une explication du phénomène de la colonisation » (p. 7). Ce livre manifeste, faut-il dire, des ambitions théoriques incontestables, s'inspire d'une méthodologie globale et fait appel, comme il se doit en l'occurrence, à des sources plus ou moins exploitées systématiquement jusqu'à maintenant dans ce genre de travail: les terriers, les registres de l'État civil, les archives de la Fabrique, celles de la municipalité, les recensements, les greffes des notaires, etc. Séguin a donc pu analyser d'assez près la marche du peuplement, la conquête du sol, les mouvements qui agitent la propriété foncière et pénétrer dans l'existence de cette communauté rurale afin d'en apercevoir la substance et la composition. Dans la perspective d'une étude partant sur une communauté vouée exclusivement à l'agriculture, cette recherche est presque sans faille majeure. Elle ne l'est pas si les paysans d'Hébertville, comme cela se produit généralement dans les paroisses de la vallée du Saint-Laurent depuis le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, participaient à des activités économiques diverses tout en cultivant le sol: fourrures, pêcheries, exploitation forestière. En l'absence de toute recherche sérieuse sur l'économie forestière, sur son impact à Hébertville même, on est en droit<sup>1</sup> de se demander pourquoi l'auteur, dès le point de départ, centre son analyse sur les rapports entre le secteur agricole et le secteur forestier, déclare que le bois est le moteur de l'économie et ne cesse d'affirmer par la suite une thèse sur les méfaits de la forêt au plan du développement économique et social. Cette anomalie au niveau de la recherche est d'autant plus regrettable qu'elle empêche l'auteur de procéder à une véritable vérification des modèles qu'il utilise pour interpréter sa documentation: « le développement du sous-développement » et celui du « développement inégal ». Pourtant

<sup>1</sup> Il est un peu curieux que L. Dechêne déclare dans sa préface qu'on aurait « mauvaise grâce » à faire ce genre de reproche à Séguin.