riche de ces contes et légendes? Partant des extraits de documents de l'époque, on a construit un mythe de Dollard qui a servi à bâtir un héros national. Le primat de l'écrit et d'une connaissance historique écrite par et pour les blancs et les clercs a produit une histoire qui répond à nos aspirations. Cette histoire, au service de qui? diront les autochtones. Comment les autochtones peuvent-ils percevoir cette histoire-là? Dollard devient un héros national à la suite d'une expédition ratée. Les conteurs-grillots-historiens se chargent de raconter et d'écrire le tout. L'histoire au sens moderne pour les autochtones : un mythe au service des groupes dominants.

La thèse de Groulx nous aide à mieux comprendre les limites d'une histoire apologétique, voire même les limites de toute histoire, d'où l'obligation d'une histoire critique, destructrice de mythes qui montrent nos limites à nous ouvrir aux autres parce que l'on a peur de nous-mêmes. Le défi est de taille s'agissant de reconstruire une histoire ou des histoires où les groupes dominants cessent de prendre toute la place. S'il n'y a rien d'héroïque dans nos vies et dans nos histoires, pourquoi ne pas partir de cela? C'est dans cette déconstruction d'une histoire mythique que surgira le pays réel sans cesse à reconstruire, à réinterpréter avec des hommes et des femmes qui y prendront place avec de nouveaux mythes qui s'imposeront. Cet ouvrage remet en cause toute histoire au service des idéologies du jour. Il nous invite comme historien à la prudence, à la vérification, au doute et à la recherche d'une vérité critique.

Camil Girard
Université du Québec à Chicoutimi et INRS/Culture et Société

Jane E. Harrison, *Until Next Year: Letter Writing and the Mails in the Canadas, 1640–1830*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997. Pp. xx, 155.

John Willis and Francine Brousseau of the Canadian Postal Museum argue in their foreword to Jane Harrison's book that Canada's postal history has not been as fully documented as it deserves to be. However, many areas have been extensively researched. Philatelic studies abound, while both historians and historical geographers have examined the Post Office and its routes. Letters are an accepted source for historians and biographers who regularly scrutinize private correspondence for evidence of social conditions and their subjects' private psychological motivations.

Harrison adopts none of these specialist approaches. Instead, she reminds us that letters were often the sole means of contact between family, friends, and business partners during the first two centuries of European settlement along the St. Lawrence and Great Lakes. Letter writing was laborious and mail routes between Europe and North America were easily disrupted, but, as Harrison ably argues, correspondents had "an acute sense of the vulnerability of the process of communications" (p. 80) and actively worked to ensure delivery of their letters. She provides ample and compelling evidence of this proactive approach to ensuring mail delivery.

Harrison introduces her readers to letters as physical objects whose production required a number of elaborate artisanal, almost artistic, skills. Much of this infor-

mation is familiar, but it provides a vivid reminder of just how valuable this act of creation made a completed letter. Paper was prepared by boiling, pressing, and drying rotting cotton rags. Ink was manufactured from soot, charcoal, lamp-blacking or gall. Until steel pen nibs were introduced at the very end of the period covered in this book, correspondents wrote with feather quills — preferably plucked from the wing tips of a domestic goose — that were treated and sharpened by hand. People wrote in elaborately stylised standard scripts. To prevent smudging, the fresh ink was dusted with an absorbent powder of black mica, and only then were letters folded according to a pattern and sealed with wax. Many letter writers performed many or all of these tasks, as a small library of recipes for paper, ink, and "sand" sat on shelves alongside equally numerous guides to penmanship and collections of sample letters.

Harrison has examined several collections of letters extensively. The Ursuline nun Marie de l'Incarnation left her adolescent son Claude — she had been married and widowed by the age of 19 — in France when she settled in Quebec in 1639. From then until her death in 1672 she corresponded regularly with Claude, her superiors, and other acquaintances in France. In all she wrote some 13,000 letters, and the extant portion of these documents provides a vivid picture of life in the young colony, but Harrison is especially interested in evidence of what she calls the "seasonality" of correspondence. The first ships to dock in the spring brought the mails with them. Replies had to be posted before the St. Lawrence froze once again in the fall. There was also a "seasonal", human rhythm to letter writing, however. Some correspondents required immediate responses. Such letters were posted on the first ship to sail. Those deserving more reflective answers, such as Claude's regular religious and moral questions, would be composed during the winter and sent to France on the first ship in the spring.

Neither immediate responses nor reflective answers were casually dispatched. Harrison shows that Marie often sent several copies of important letters by different ships. Marie and her contemporaries were aware that French shipping was threatened by hostile navies, pirates, and storms, and it was simply common sense to send several copies of important documents. Ships were not the only vulnerable part of the delivery process, however. Substantial sections of important letters might be sent to several people, via different routes, with instructions to pass the information on to its intended recipient. Similarly, correspondents appointed agents, usually prominent acquaintances in French port towns, to collect their letters from docking ships and forward them to their destinations. Quebec's seasonal mail system was most suited for those who lived in the capital, and as the French colony grew a similar system of agents transferred the mails to the interior. For those like the Jesuit martyr Charles Garnier who lived near Georgian Bay, letters were delivered and dispatched by traders and explorers as they passed by irregularly in their canoes.

Relatively more reliable sea passages commenced with the peace of 1763 which ended the naval skirmishing that had jeopardized the mails during the previous decades. In that same year the first official postal service was founded to carry the mails between Quebec and Montreal. Quebec remained the most important port on the St. Lawrence for the next 80 years, but correspondents like the Scottish seigneur

William Nairne, who had come to North America with General Wolfe, now had the choice of sending their letters through the busier year-round harbours of Halifax and New York. Nairne farmed just below Quebec City at Murray Bay from which port he could dispatch letters to Europe, but he also used two options further down the St. Lawrence: the canoe route through Lake Champlain and the Hudson River to New York, or the Madawaska and Saint John rivers to Halifax. Sleds carried the mails along these routes in winter. Nairne had good reason to employ a year-round mail service. His children were educated at Scottish schools, from which they regularly sought and received their father's guidance. By 1802 the ailing Nairne was confident enough in the swiftness and reliability of his mail delivery to write an Edinburgh friend asking him to consult a medical specialist on his behalf. Despite his obvious confidence in the mails, Nairne succumbed before receiving a reply.

Harrison uses letters in a novel way: to tell us what measures Canadians took to correspond at a time when links between Europe and North America were extremely important, but equally vulnerable. Colonists devised and exploited different means to ensure their letters were delivered in the absence of a reliable official government postal service. Her evidence is drawn almost entirely from the letters themselves, but Harrison has avoided the common social historians' trap by capably setting her evidence within its wider historical context. A series of maps plot the growth of settlements and canoe routes to the interior, while charts record the growth of trans-Atlantic shipping over these two centuries. The sum is a book which argues compellingly that letter writing was extremely important to early Canadians and that evidence contained in postal sources provides a greater understanding of the country's past.

Finally, this book is as physically appealing as the letters Harrison has studied. Harrison's prose is clear and her book's many illustrations make the story more vivid. *Until Next Year* is that most enjoyable form of scholarship: an academic study that explores new territory while remaining accessible and enjoyable to the common reader.

Andrew Horrall
Canadian Postal Museum

E. A. Heaman — *The Inglorious Arts of Peace: Exhibitions in Canadian Society During the Nineteenth Century.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.

The study of fairs and exhibitions has become a "suddenly fashionable topic" in historical circles, observes E. A. Heaman at the outset of her new book. Heaman joins H. V. Nelles (*The Art of Nation*) and Keith Walden (*Becoming Modern in Toronto*), who have recently published in this field. Having read — and thoroughly enjoyed — Nelles and Walden, I jumped at the chance to review *The Inglorious Arts of Peace*. The splendid jacket illustration of the Canadian agricultural trophy in London, England, in 1886 is surely one of the most attractive coming out of the University of Toronto Press.