

Joan Dawson, *The Mapmaker's Eye*

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Dawson, Joan. *The Mapmaker's Eye: Nova Scotia Through Early Maps*. Halifax: Nimbus Publishing Limited and The Nova Scotia Museum, 1988. 156 pp., ill., 67 maps. Paper \$16.95, ISBN 0-921054-12-2.

Archivists working in media other than textual records are well aware of the need for tools to teach researchers how to use their documents. There is nothing more frustrating than researchers who appear on your doorstep looking for the perfect map, photograph, or print to illustrate the manuscript they carry in their hands. Their research was done months ago and now, having finished the manuscript, they want to add some illustrations before sending it off to a publisher. There was never any consideration given to using non-textual media as part of their research. Non-textual media, as the reasoning goes, have no other purpose than the illustration of the written record.

As a librarian and student of the history of cartography, Joan Dawson is well aware of the reluctance that some researchers have to using maps in historical studies. In *The Mapmaker's Eye* Dawson sets out to try and remedy this situation by showing her readers how maps can be used to document the early history of Nova Scotia. In doing so, she hopes to encourage her readers "to seek out examples of maps of their own communities or fields of interest" (p. 1). Her objective is noble, and for the most part, it has been achieved.

Dawson's study begins with a description of three sixteenth-century maps of the east coast of North America. These documents set the stage for the more detailed mapping of Nova Scotia that followed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which is the main subject of *The Mapmaker's Eye*. This introduction is followed by an outline of the different types of maps the early European visitors made of Nova Scotia, and the surveyors and cartographers who made them.

As a "cartographical approach to the history of Nova Scotia" (p. 1), *The Mapmaker's Eye* breaks from the familiar chronological treatment that many similar works follow. Instead, Dawson has chosen a thematic approach, and in six separate chapters, she examines the major themes depicted in the early cartography

of Nova Scotia: Fishing; Farming and Food Production; Minerals, Wood and Water; Forts and Harbours; Habitation and Settlement; and Inland Transportation. In total, Dawson uses 67 early maps from 18 different institutions to illustrate these themes.

To some readers a thematic approach may seem somewhat strange because cartographers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were not interested in producing specialized maps. Their documents tended to be more general, including information on all aspects of the new land rather than specific themes. While the thematic approach may lend itself very well to demonstrating how maps can be used in historical research, it sometimes leaves the reader confused. For example, the maps produced by any one cartographer might be discussed in several different chapters. This breakup of the chronological order makes it difficult for readers to develop an impression for the overall progress of discovery made by the early mapmakers of Nova Scotia. However, readers should keep in mind that this study is intended more as a "how to" than as a history.

The six thematic chapters are followed by a brief conclusion, an excellent list of references, and an index. Unfortunately, Dawson has not included a section on the technology of early surveying and mapping. A discussion of map production methods and the technological problems cartographers encountered, in their attempts to reproduce the earth's surface on paper, would certainly have value for researchers interested in material history. Also, it would have provided her less experienced readers with a better basis from which to undertake their own assessments of the maps from this period. To her credit, Dawson does offer some insights into map production methods, but they are spread throughout the text. In comparison to the detailed descriptions she provides for many of the individual maps, the technological discussions are much too limited.

Despite these minor flaws, I found Dawson's book is well worth the purchase price. It is an ambitious work that will surely have considerable influence on how early maps are used in future historical studies.