

## LENORE NEWMAN

Review of

Jonah, Anne Marie Lane, and Chantal Véchambre. 2012. *French Taste in Atlantic Canada, 1604–1758: A Gastronomic History / Le goût français au Canada atlantique, 1604–1758 : une histoire gastronomique*. Sydney, NS: Cape Breton University Press.

Pp. x, 251, colour photographs, recipes, bibliography, index, English and French, hardcover, ISBN 9781897009772, \$29.95.

When we think of Acadian cuisine, we tend to think of post-expulsion dishes like the fricot and butterscotch pie found in towns such as Cheticamp, or our thoughts go south to the expatriate Acadians in Louisiana and their rich Cajun cuisine. However, before the expulsions beginning in 1755, a different cuisine thrived in Acadia and the Isle Royale colonies. In *French Taste in Atlantic Canada*, Anne Marie Lane Jonah, staff historian at the Fortress of Louisbourg, and chef Chantal Véchambre weave a gripping tale of a distinct and understudied cuisine.

Despite being set amid a particularly turbulent period of East Coast history, the text does a good job of exploring how French cuisine was altered by local conditions and global events. The authors explore the often overlooked impact of the Mi'kmaq, who worked closely with the Acadians. The Mi'kmaq introduced a host of new practices and ingredients, including the brewing of birch beer, a practice taken up by Acadians at the household level. This cultural interplay is captured in illustrative details, such as the story of Acadians fishing for oysters in winter through the sea ice, and then flavouring them with nutmeg in the medieval style. This interplay of adaptation and tradition fills the book. My one wish as the story deepens would be for a simple timeline for reference, as the various displacements and expulsions become difficult to track since the narrative skips between different culinary courses, bouncing the reader around the region and into multiple time periods.

One of the great strengths of this book is the practical application of multiple research methods illustrated in the narrative. The authors draw on the expected journals and cookbooks, but also delve into archeological digs, the study of kitchen

artifacts, an examination of period paintings, and even an exploration of court transcripts to tease out the shape of culinary life within the fort. The use of photographs helps keep the reader engaged in the piecing together of a cuisine.

The wealth of detail that illustrates understudied events in Canada's history is also engaging; the reader is introduced to the evacuation of the Acadians of Plaisance, Newfoundland, in 1713, and the bustling trade of cod, sugar and rum that dominated the Atlantic. The Acadians emerge as a distinct French presence in North America. The disruption of attack and exile recurs throughout the text, and the hardships these events imposed and the illustration of life at sea are a nice addition, reminding the reader that this was a time of immense upheaval. The use of individual stories to explore this turmoil makes the narrative much more personal for the reader.

Lastly, the recipes included in the book provide an interesting way to experience life at Louisbourg first-hand. I tried out a few of the dishes, and found that overall they were easy to prepare and fit the period well. The *ployes* in particular work well as an easy demonstration of period cooking, and the menus tie the recipes together. In a few places I wished the recipes and text spoke a little more closely to each other; for example, pomegranates appear in the salad section, but their interesting history in North America isn't explored. Truffles are mentioned in the early pages of the book, but if and how they were transported across the Atlantic isn't mentioned. These small omissions, however, do not detract from what is one of the first really thorough investigations of a specific historical treatment of a regional Canadian cuisine.