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Margaret Conrad: Planter and Loyalist Contributions

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Abstract

This paper examines Margaret Conrad's central contributions to the fields of Planter and Loyalist Studies, underlining her combination of originality in research and commitment to making this history accessible to the general public.

Résumé

Cet article étudie les contributions centrales de Margaret Conrad dans le domaine des études Planteurs et des études Loyalistes, soulignant sa combinaison d'originalité dans la recherche et son engagement à rendre cette histoire accessible au grand public.

Whether imaginatively resurrecting traditional recipes (*The Joy of Ginger*), editing Maritime women's diaries, stimulating research into the 1760 Planter Maritime migration (*They Planted Well*), or leading virtual archives projects (*Loyalist Women in New Brunswick; Black Loyalists*), Margaret Conrad has made enduring contributions to Planter and Loyalist scholarship.

In her co-authored cookbook, *The Joy of Ginger*, Margaret Conrad includes a recipe for Glenaladale Christmas Cake, a dark fruitcake rich with inventiveness. As a recipe, it bears many of the characteristics that have been hallmarks of Margaret's career as an historian. It is, she informs us in the liner notes, a tried and true recipe originally obtained from a cook at Macdonald College in Montreal, for many years the seat of household science training in Canada. In other words, the recipe for this cake, typical of Margaret's approach to any subject, is founded on research. It is also, she adds, a recipe inherited from her grandmother, Laura Slauenwhite, of Lunenburg County. The recipe is, then, an enduring manifestation of women's work, of women's stories, of women's legacies handed down from one generation to the next. Like the diaries that have formed such a strong core of Margaret's academic writing, this cookbook and its recipes have resonance as part of a pattern of cultural continuity.

But this cake, unlike most Christmas cakes, contains ginger - indeed, a cup of it - an ingredient elemental in the infrastructure of nineteenth-century Maritime trade and domestic use. Like molasses, ginger was a staple in the region, a spice brought from exotic climes in exchange for dried cod, and it is typical of the understanding of cultural patterns that Margaret brings to her analysis of Maritime history that she knows that ginger

ice cream and ginger Christmas cakes are uniquely regional.

Finally, as I read the side notes to the Glenaladale Christmas Cake recipe, I am drawn to the verb "invent" in the margin. What cake baker dare "invent"? Yet Margaret, just as she does with her students, just as she does with her own research, pushes against conformity to get an interesting result. Who else would say: "Forget raisins in your Christmas cake. Try blueberries."

In the long run, what we have in Margaret's Glenaladale Christmas cake recipe is the intersection of research and originality - a combination that she has brought to every endeavour that she has undertaken, whether creating a cookbook, helping to set up a Centre for Planter Studies at Acadia University, or working with the Electronic Text Centre (ETC) at the University of New Brunswick (UNB) to resuscitate the marginalized lives of Loyalist women and Black Loyalists. I have been privileged to know Margaret in all these roles - to have been living in Wolfville when she and Heather MacDonald were testing recipes for their cookbook at special Friday night dinners; to have moved to Acadia from Mount Allison in 1988 just as the Planter Studies Centre, with Barry Moody and Margaret at its core, planned conferences, published proceedings, and stimulated public outreach; and, in the past eight years, to have been part of the University of New Brunswick's infrastructure when Margaret joined the faculty as a Tier 1 Canada Research Chair (CRC) in Atlantic Canada Studies. As at Acadia, she has been a catalyst at UNB in stimulating projects and research, this time in Loyalist Studies. And, in the process, she has successfully applied for national research funds that have generated a series of exciting projects, including a re-assessment of the importance of the Edward Winslow letters, an eighteenth to nineteenth-century collection, valued at a million dollars, that had been languishing in Archives and Special Collections until Margaret reminded people of their liveliness and importance.

In terms of the continuity of period and subject matter, there seems to be an almost seamless line between what Margaret

helped to achieve in the creation of Planter Studies at Acadia and what she has stimulated in Loyalist Studies at UNB. In an unexpected way, the late historian, Esther Clark Wright, is a common thread between these two parts of Margaret's influence and career. Born in Fredericton, the daughter of a former Lieutenant Governor of New Brunswick - a PhD graduate of Radcliffe at Harvard, known for landmark books such as *Planters and Pioneers* (1978) and the *Loyalists of New Brunswick* (1955) - Esther Clark Wright lived within walking distance of the Beveridge Arts Centre at Acadia (indeed, the Acadia Archives is named in her memory). It was at her house, over tea sometime in the 1970s, recalls Barry Moody (for many years Chair of the History Department at Acadia), that he, Margaret, and Dr. Wright spoke with enthusiasm about the scholarly work waiting to be done on the approximately 8000 Planters who had immigrated to Nova Scotia between 1759 and 1774. It was there, he feels, with the support of former President Watson Kirkconnell, that the idea for a Planter Studies Committee (established in the History Department in 1983) and, more importantly, a Planter Studies Centre, was conceived. Today, the Centre has been operating as a stimulus for Planter research for more than twenty years, but, "without Margaret," noted Barry Moody in a telephone conversation on 29 April 2009, "Planter Studies would not have happened. We would have talked about it - but she made it happen."

In particular, Margaret was the driving force behind the first Planter conference, an exciting opportunity for new research organized around the title, "They Planted Well," and drawing one hundred and fifty people from all parts of Canada and beyond. As was to be a pattern in the next two conferences as well, the organizing committee invited a keynote speaker from the United States to provide the New England background to current work going on in Canada. Out of that first conference came a collection of essays published by Acadiensis Press in 1988 (and now available on-line on the UNB website). This was edited by Margaret and it is a landmark volume. First of all, its tight editing, quality of writing, and

organization represent Margaret's excellent editing skills. It may not be well known that, early in her career, she was an editor for Clarke Irwin, and, ever since, she has brought to her own writing, and to her editing of collections such as those in the Planter series, a level of acumen, meticulous research, and clarity of expression that are highly professional. *They Planted Well: New England Planters In Maritime Canada* reflects Margaret's sure editorial hand in all of these categories, and, in an insightful introduction, puts to rest the term "pre-Loyalist" for the Planters forever. The final words of the book - "Hang on to your spelling!" - are those of Esther Clark Wright to the assembled conference after being made the first Planter Scholar in the Planter Studies Centre. Whether we can honour that charge in the age of Google remains to be seen.

There are many highlights that emerge from the successive Planter Conferences and from the proceedings: *Making Adjustments: Change and Continuity in Planter Nova Scotia: 1759-1800* (1991) and *Intimate Relations: Family and Community in Planter Nova Scotia: 1759-1800* (1995), both edited by Margaret (she has also, more recently, co-edited a fourth volume with Barry Moody). In her introductions to the various volumes, she not only reminds us of the new research emerging in the papers of the collections but also the exciting artistic and public events stimulated by the Planter conferences - for example, the launching of Professor Michael Miller's opera on Henry Alline in the Acadia chapel; a concert of Planter-era music performed by the Elastic Millennium Choir in the old Covenanters' Church at Grand Pré; and a field trip to the Kentville Courthouse Museum where Parks Canada had mounted a Planter exhibit in conjunction with the 1993 conference. My own favourite memory of those golden cultural moments informing the conference sessions (no one skipped anything) was Mount Allison poet Douglas Lochhead's reading of his long poem, "Homage to Henry Alline," written especially for the conference. And, as we sat in the golden twilight of the Old Covenanters' Church at Grand Pré - eyes turned upward to the early 19th century pulpit where the poet

was delivering his rhetorical line: "Your horse, Henry. What about your horse?" - a lone horse clattered down the centre of the Grand Pré road, past the church, galloping off toward the dykes, as the words "What about your horse?" lingered in the air.

Several years before Margaret left Acadia and moved to the University of New Brunswick as a Canada Research Chair, she successfully applied for national funding on behalf of the Planter Studies Centre to support the preparation of *New England Planters in the Maritime Provinces, 1759-1800: A Bibliography of Primary Sources*. Containing over three thousand entries found in archives, libraries, and museums all over Canada and the United States, the bibliography, prepared by Judith Norton, was added to the Planter Centre website in an on-line version readily accessible to the general public. This kind of public accessibility to recent Planter research had always been a priority for Margaret, who, with her committee, had invited historical groups, genealogical societies, and the general public to attend the Planter conferences. And the newsletter of the Planter Centre, for many years prepared by the late Dr. John Thomas, went out to a wide range of readers.

This interest in public history is one that Margaret has carried into her research, grant applications, and team initiatives since moving to the University of New Brunswick in 2002. Now living in a province that in 2009 celebrated the 225th anniversary of its Loyalist founding and naming, Margaret has turned her attention to the next major American migration into the Maritimes following the Planters - that of the Loyalists. We are blessed at UNB to have an outstanding facility in the ETC, and an even more outstanding team of inspired professionals running it. Margaret was not at UNB for very long before her interest in public history, in the outstanding archival holdings of both UNB and the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick, and in the skills and support of the ETC, intersected to create a series of University of New Brunswick, Canada Research Chair, and Heritage Canada funded-projects. Her Atlantic Canada Virtual

Archive (atlanticportal.hil.unb.ca), a "bilingual, multilayered website," designed "to explore the use of communication technology to support research" related to the Atlantic Provinces, remains one of the most relevant electronic resources for those wanting to access "primary and secondary sources on the region." However, it is the Atlantic Canada Virtual Archive (ACVA) project - funded by the Canadian Culture Online Program of Canadian Heritage (and various other donors) - that has opened up new possibilities for heightening interest in Loyalist research. The ACVA has been a joint initiative of Margaret, as Canada Research Chair in Atlantic Canada Studies, and the ETC (Margaret and Lisa Charlong, until recently Assistant Director of the ETC, have been project directors, and there is an Advisory Board). The availability of a searchable electronic collection such as that of the Edward Winslow letters for 1783-85 has made it possible for everyone from schoolchildren studying the Loyalists, to genealogists and historians, to immerse themselves on-line in the witty, truculent, and sometimes inebriated letters of one of New Brunswick's most important colonial figures. The site has been praised by educators (school children love to try writing with the on-line quill pen). And, for those working on colonial culture, the digitized letters provide a fascinating insight into family life and an evolving political infrastructure in New Brunswick.

More recently, Margaret, working with Heritage Canada funding, the ETC, and a range of academic and private researchers in the Maritime region, has broadened the availability and accessibility of current Loyalist research by mounting projects on Loyalist Women in New Brunswick and on Black Loyalists on the Atlantic Canada Virtual Archives website. *The Loyalist Women in New Brunswick: 1783-1854* site makes diaries, poems, letters, legal records and articles available to readers ranging from students to genealogists (<http://atlanticportal.hil.unb.ca/acva/en/>). Moreover, it has helped to consolidate the disparate efforts of those working on the Loyalist period by bringing private scholars, archivists, museum consultants, academics,

school teachers, and students together in a Loyalist Research Network (<http://loyalistresearchnet.org>). At an organizational meeting held at King's Landing in the summer of 2008, Loyalist Research Network planners decided to create a listserve of Loyalist researchers across the country, develop a website supporting the research network's interests (including upcoming conferences, new books in the field, etc.), and encourage researchers to actively disseminate their work in relevant conferences (see also the Loyalist Collection at www.lib.unb.ca/collections/loyalist). The Loyalist Research Network, working with Margaret, Professor Bonnie Huskins, and the ETC, promises to reinforce the impetus in stimulating Loyalist studies that has been inspired by the energy, vision, and funding that Margaret has brought to her UNB web-related projects.

In the midst of all of this Loyalist activity, Margaret has not totally abandoned the Planters. The keynote speaker at the second Planter conference held at Acadia in 1990 was the American scholar of colonial literacy, Jennifer Monaghan, from the City University of New York. She brought to our discussions new insights into the degree to which our Maritime Planter and Loyalist women may have been able to write as well as read. Her research sparked Margaret's interest in the young Anna Green Winslow, who, in 1770, was sent from her Fort Cumberland home to Boston to study penmanship, fine sewing, and the language of the wider world. Margaret's paper on Anna Green Winslow, "My Aunt Deming Don't Approve of My English," presented to the Northeast American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies in Salem, Massachusetts, in the fall of 2006, marries her interest in Planter Studies, Women's Studies, and the on-going colonial relationship between the Maritimes and the Boston states. Its narrative represents, in a sense, the intellectual curiosity, shrewd cultural analysis, and sheer delight in the vagaries of human nature that have marked so many of Margaret's projects. Because Planter Studies and, now, Loyalist Studies - especially the role of women in those male dominated worlds -

are a constant source of fascination for Margaret, we can look forward, I hope, to her continuing passion for exploring the lives of the Anna Green Winslows of the world. Although - like Esther Clark Wright - I think that the editor in Margaret would have responded to Anna's "My Aunt Deming don't approve of my English," by advising her to "Hang onto your spelling!"

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