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W. J. Eccles, *Frontenac: The Courtier Governor*. Reprint of the original 1959 ed. with a new introduction by Peter N. Moogk. Lincoln and London, U.K.: University of Nebraska Press, 2003. xvii + 405. Maps, notes, bibliography, and index. \$24.95 (pb). ISBN 0-8032-6750-9.

Review by Dale Miquelon, University of Saskatchewan.

Louis de Buade, comte de Frontenac et de Palluau, was the governor of Canada from 1672 to 1682 and from 1689 until his death in 1698. In 1877, the great Bostonian, Francis Parkman, had placed Frontenac on the hero's pedestal in a biography that over eighty years later was still the standard account. Other biographies, most notably that in French by Henri Lorin (1895), were all worshipful studies in the Great Man mode of writing history. *Frontenac: The Courtier Governor*, published in 1959 when W.J. Eccles was a young history professor at the University of Alberta, banished all such panegyrics. It toppled Frontenac from his pedestal. In later life, one of Eccles's prize possessions was Peter Moogk's framed cartoon of him as "Guillaume le Marteau," who having shattered the statues of Frontenac and Parkman, is saying "What do you mean 'Iconoclast'?" For this welcome new edition of *Frontenac*, Moogk has written an introduction that provides us with real insight into that most complex of men, Bill Eccles.

W. J. Eccles's lectures, which I was lucky enough to attend in 1960, were like his new book in that they smelled strongly and freshly of the archives. We went to each class eager to hear whom, historical figure or historian, Eccles would next skewer. Everything he told his students was new to us. As a student, I scanned through the over 1000 footnotes of *Frontenac* and counted the documentary series and the many French and Canadian archives listed. A subject that had mostly been treated as remembering and celebrating was here the object of deep research and long analytical passages. The challenges to other authors dead or alive, especially to Parkman, were occasionally overt, but everywhere implicit. Given the book's reputation, I am surprised now at its moderate tone.

*Frontenac* was reprinted in McClelland and Stewart's "The Carleton Library" in 1965, but has been out of print for some time. Now its pages reappear exactly as first published. There is a handsome new cover. Its historical painting of Frontenac, seated on a rocky outcropping in the forest, attended by a court of Indians and a priest, must originally have been conceived in the heroic vein, but in the light of the text, must now be read ironically. *Frontenac* is still a treat to read, even though in the 1950s Eccles had not yet become the graceful stylist of his later works. There is the mordant wit, the tart comment, and more than a trace of the romantic-in-spite-of-himself that were hallmarks of his personality.

It is easy to forget exactly what Eccles wrote in this first book, which is obscured by the success of his later books, *Canada Under Louis XIV, 1663-1701* (1964), *The Canadian Frontier, 1504-1760* (1969), *France in America* (1972, with revised editions in 1990 and in 1998 as *The French In North America*), and *Essays on New France* (1987). First and foremost is his demolition of the Frontenac myth and his portrait of the governor as grasping, egotistical, duplicitous, and none too competent. Second, is his placing of this portrait and the history of the colony within the context of the ancien régime. Third, there is his lightly-sketched portrait of Canadian society that is the basic idea of *The Canadian Frontier*. Fourth, there are two fine chapters, "The Little War" (on guerilla warfare) and "Military Organization in New France," that are models in themselves and point to his later work on these topics. Fifth, there is his periodization of the history of New France, which provided the structure for *Canada Under Louis XIV* and through that, of *The Centenary History of Canada*, of which that volume was a part. Sixth, while it was in this latter book that Eccles first coined the phrase "the Compact Colony Policy" to describe Jean-Baptiste Colbert's plan for Canada, there appears in *Frontenac* a map of Canada and its North American hinterland entitled,

however anomalously, “New France--The Compact Colony.” Seventh, there is the respect for North American Indians as significant and rational players in history--readers should make allowances for the 1950's politically-incorrect vocabulary. It is startling to discover how much of W.J. Eccles's research agenda and how many of his ideas are here, at the beginning, in *Frontenac*.

Eccles makes a good case for Frontenac's having been given the governorship of New France as a way to protect him from his creditors. Frontenac must also have been well advised on the lucrative possibilities of the fur trade, something we know nothing of, since upon arriving in Canada, he lost no time in assembling a fur trade expedition to the outlet of Lake Ontario, where he founded Fort Frontenac at the site of modern Kingston. Year after year, he and his coterie, which included the explorer La Salle, traded with the Five Nations Iroquois and with the Illinois and Miamis far to the west. According to Eccles, he was incapable of seeing that the Iroquois were the natural enemies of Canada, whereas Canada's salvation lay in the alliances of his Canadian rivals with the Ottawas, Hurons, and other peoples of the upper Great Lakes. He was also serene in the face of English fur trade competition on Hudson Bay, in Eccles's view because this too was a trade managed by his rivals. Once the Mohawks had chased the Mohicans out of the Hudson Valley and conquered the Andastes (Susquehannahs) to the south and so were free to attack Canada, the colony was thus completely unprepared.

Luckily for Frontenac, he had already left Canada when the storm broke and he was able to blame it entirely upon his successor. When he returned to Canada for his second term as governor (this time, more in need of protection from creditors and of fur trade profits than ever), he arrived just after the adhesion of England to William of Orange's Grand Alliance, which unleashed English support for the Iroquois attacks on Canada. Once again, his timing was excellent. In his official dispatches and in the long memoranda he sent to his wife for circulation at court, he was able to convey the impression that only his return stood between Canada and utter destruction at the hands of the Iroquois. Parkman had swallowed this hook, line, and sinker; for him, Frontenac was “the man for the hour.” Frontenac's strategy of border raids on New York and New England showed that he still had a blind eye to the need to hamstring the Iroquois, most expeditiously by destroying Albany. It united the northern English colonies against Canada. Only English colonial ineptitude saved Canada from a two-prong attack: an army led against Montreal collapsed in confusion; William Phips's expedition against Quebec was stymied by the task before it and fell prey to illness.

In the 1950's, Eccles was a proponent of the thesis that Canada and the Five Nations were rivals in the fur trade of the Great Lakes and upper Mississippi, as both wished to be the middlemen of the trade of the interior nations. He used George T. Hunt's *The Wars of the Iroquois; a Study in Intertribal Trade Relations* (1940, reprinted in 1960) as a textbook in his classes. It undergirds the pages of *Frontenac*. In later life, Eccles repudiated the Hunt thesis and looked favourably upon the work of younger scholars who championed explanations that seemed to reflect a more anthropologically-sound understanding of Indian behaviour. Can we salvage the explanation of Franco-Iroquois rivalry in *Frontenac* while repudiating Hunt? Clearly, the fur trade caused an immense disruption of intertribal relations, but rivalries may have been less for fur as an economic good than for the alliances built upon fur. When the dust of dispute settles, we may still see the fur trade as fundamental to New France/Five Nations enmity.

Eccles also delves deeply into Fontenac's ham-fisted handling of civil matters during his two terms as governor, beginning with his attempts to dominate the Sovereign Council of New France and to be given by it the title of “High and Mighty Lord.” The governor appears as being egotistical to the point of absurdity, quick to anger, not above man-handling people when he thought he could get away with it, avaricious, paranoid, and self-deceiving. If the unflattering portrait is in startling contrast to that drawn by Parkman, Lorin, and other enthusiasts, it is not so different from the views of Frontenac's contemporaries. “I see clearly that everything gives way to your private enmities,” Louis XIV wrote to Frontenac in 1681, “and that which concerns my service and the execution of my orders is rarely the sole motive of your actions” (p.148). “He has always done the wrong thing,” Pontchartrain wrote of him in

1698

(p.

313).

If Frontenac always did the wrong thing, why was he given so much responsibility on a critical frontier? Birth and connections were all important in empires that were, to adapt John Bright's famous phrase, gigantic systems of outdoor relief for the aristocracy. For the historian of Old France, perhaps the most interesting aspect of Frontenac's career would be the story still largely left in shadow of the mentality, the court-centred system of government, and the specific connections that gave him Canada's governorship twice in the face of all his ineptitudes. We citizens of the New World can still hardly believe it.

Dale Miquelon  
University of Saskatchewan  
dale.miquelon@usask.ca

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