

L'Ordre de Bon Temps:
A Functional Analysis*
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As the year of 1606 waned in the small fort community of Port Royal, an idea began to crystallize in the fertile mind of a man destined to become the first Governor of New France. His idea was simple and when expressed to his peers gained enthusiastic support. He proposed that a social group be formally structured to help while away the dreary evening hours of the bleak Nova Scotian winter. Samuel de Champlain was even prepared to suggest a name for his fraternity; it was to be called "L'Ordre de Bon Temps." Thus, a handful of spirited adventurers were to give birth, in rather humble surroundings, to the first social club to be structured by Caucasians in North America.

What was Champlain's rationale for the formation of such a club and what did he see as its function? These two questions are interrelated and might best be answered if one were to first turn back the calendar a number of years.

The Port Royal Habitation was founded on the north shore of Nova Scotia's Annapolis Basin in August, 1606. It was certainly not the first European attempt to establish a permanent settlement in the New World, nor was it even the first to bear this illustrious name.¹ It was, however, the first successful attempt by Frenchmen to establish a permanent community in North America. Indeed, some have claimed it to be the first permanent European colony north of Mexico.²

Be that as it may, one fact remains ; Port Royal succeeded where other colonization attempts had failed. By way of example : the Norseman, Thorfinn Karlsefni, had unsuccessfully attempted to colonize "Vinland" (probably the coast of New

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¹In 1562, Jean Ribaut landed a party of French Huguenots on the east coast of Florida where they constructed a crude fort on an island in Port Royal harbour. Like other sixteenth century French colonization attempts this one was also doomed to failure.

²See, for example Edgar McInnis, *Canada: A Political and Social History* (Toronto, 1959), pp. 23-24; and the monument erected in honour of Pierre du Guast, Sieur de Monts by the Canadian Government at Annapolis Royal in 1901. The inscription on the tablet claims that de Monts there founded "The first settlement of Europeans north of the Gulf of Mexico." A photograph of this monument is contained in John Quinpool, *First Things In Acadia: The Birthplace of a Continent*. (Halifax, 1936), p. 144.

England or Nova Scotia) as early as 1025; in 1541 Jacques Cartier landed settlers at Cap Rouge above Quebec only to abandon the site the following year; Jean Francois de la Rocque, Sieur de Roberval, occupied Cartier's settlement in 1542 for a one year period before returning to France; 1564 saw Rene de Laudonnière construct Fort Caroline in Florida and lose it within twelve months to the Spaniard Pedro Menéndez de Avilès. By 1568 this settlement, too, had disappeared; the year 1583 heralded the unsuccessful attempts of Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Humphrey Gilbert to colonize Roanoke Island and Newfoundland, respectively; Troilus de Mesgouez, Marquis de la Roche's efforts to locate settlers on Sable Island in 1598 turned out to be an unqualified disaster; and finally, the Tadoussac settlement at the mouth of the Saguenay, established by Pierre Chauvin in 1600,³ proved to be merely another example in long series of failures.

These attempts to colonize strange and, at times, inhospitable environments failed for a variety of reasons, chief among which were the problems of scurvy and starvation, the fear of native aggression and homesickness — conditions that were to prove an ideal medium for the growth of discontent and intra-group conflict. Was Champlain aware of the problems that were to face the Acadian settlers? If not, experience was to be his teacher.

In December 1603, Pierre du Guast, Sieur de Monts was granted a monopoly on the fur trade by Henry IV and a royal commission authorizing him to establish colonies in New France.⁴ Although his monopoly included both Acadia and the St. Lawrence, he elected to settle in the Maritimes and in June, 1604, established his colony on the Island of Sainte Croix in the Bay of Fundy off the coast of Marine.⁵

Summer and fall passed pleasantly for the settlers, secure on their easily defended island. Winter, however, was to bring disaster. St. Croix was exposed to the biting north winds and lacked both wood and fresh water.⁶ The settlers, apprehensive of the natives camped elsewhere on the island, and prevented

³For further information on these early colonization attempts see W. L. Morton, *The Kingdom of Canada* (Toronto, 1969), pp. 3-27; McInnis, *Canada*, pp. 17-26; J. M. S. Careless, *Canada: A Story of Challenge* (Toronto, 1963), pp. 23-26; Samuel Eliot Morison, *The European Discovery of America: The Northern Voyages A.D. 500-1600* (New York, 1971) and W. P. Cumming, R. A. Skelton and D. B. Quinn, *The Discovery of North America* (New York, 1972).

⁴Marc Lescaurbot, *The History of New France, Book IV*, trans. W. L. Grant, Vol. II (Toronto, 1911) pp. 211-224.

⁵Samuel de Champlain, "The Voyages of Sieur & Champlain of Sointonge, Book I," in *The Works of Samuel de Champlain*, ed. and trans. H. H. Longton and W. F. Gonong, Vol. I (Toronto, 1922), p. 274.

⁶Marc Lescaurbot, *Nova Francia: A Description of Acadia, 1606*, ed. E. D. Ross and E. Power, trans. P. Erondelle (London, 1928), p. 33.

from hunting on the mainland by the tidal ice-jams of the river, were forced to survive on melted snow, wine, salt meat and the few vegetables they had been able to hoard during the summer.⁷ The arrival of spring saw thirty-five of the original seventy-nine men in the colony dead of scurvy.⁸ Baird, in fact, maintains that only eleven remained free of ailments throughout the entire winter. “These were a jolly company of hunters, who preferred rabbit hunting, to the air of the fireside; skating on the ponds, to turning over lazily in bed; making snowballs to bring down the game, to sitting around the fire talking about Paris and its good cooks.”⁹ De Monts, a veteran of Chauvin’s unsuccessful colonization attempt, was obviously aware of the inherent values of physical activity for he had constructed opposite his quarters “. . . a covered gallery, to be used . . . for sports. . .)”¹⁰ While the amount of use it received is questionable, there is no doubt that the relationships between diet, exercise and good health were firmly implanted in the mind of Champlain.

Such was the state of the survivors that de Monts seriously considered abandoning the project in May; however, when Francois du Pont-Gravé arrived a month later bringing supplies and new settlers from France, he decided to continue the venture and relocate his colony. The site selected was Port Royal on the sheltered west coast of Nova Scotia. Having helped erect dwellings and plant gardens for the new arrivals, de Monts set sail for France accompanied by all but three of the remaining St. Croix colonists.¹¹

While Pont-Gravé began to prepare for the rigours of the months ahead, Champlain continued with the explorations he had begun the previous year. Thus, the fall passed and winter set in. Although it was relatively mild in comparison with that of 1604-5, it again brought with it scurvy¹² and unrest — unrest that periodically flared into physical violence. Although the colonists obviously fared better than had their predecessors on St. Croix, enjoying a more wholesome diet and an amicable relationship with the neighbouring Micmac Indians, their lot was not a happy one. After several abortive attempts in the

⁷Champlain. *Voyager*, pp. 306-7.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 304.

⁹Pierre Biard, “Biard’s Relations, 1616.” *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, ed. R. G. Thwaites, Vol. III, (Cleveland, 1897), p. 53.

¹⁰Lescarbot, *History*, p. 255.

¹¹The three who volunteered to stay in Port Royal were the Sieurs de Fougeray, de Champdore and Champlain. In all, forty-five persons remained in the new colony. Champlain, *Voyager*, p. 371.

¹²Seventeen colonies were afflicted, of which twelve died before spring. *Ibid.*, p. 377 and Lescarbot, *History*, p. 282.

spring to explore the coastline to the south, Pont-Gravé, realizing that they could not brave another winter of privation and scurvy without fresh supplies and medicine, began to plan their return to France. As fate would have it, their departure was forestalled by the arrival of Jean de Biencourt, Sieur de Poutrincourt.¹³

De Poutrincourt's party of colonists, many of whom "... were a villainous lot . . . [and] had good reason for leaving France,"¹⁴ soon established themselves in the Port Royal Habitation thus allowing the survivors of the previous winter to return to their homeland under the captaincy of Pont-Gravé.¹⁵ While de Poutrincourt spent September and October exploring the coast of New England, the newcomers, under the guidance of Marc Lescarbot, readied the settlement for winter.

Champlain was also reflecting on the months ahead. He had been exposed to the sickness and discontent, to the fear and the loneliness of other settlers during the two previous winters and was well aware of the dangers this group of pioneers faced with the coming of snow. To Champlain, the task was clear. In order for the settlement to survive (and this was imperative if he were to continue his explorations) four objectives had to be achieved. First, the daily diet of the colonists would have to be improved and, secondly, the men had to be encouraged to engage in challenging physical pursuits throughout the winter months. Operating on the premise that poor diets and a passive existence had contributed to the previous outbreaks of scurvy,¹⁶ Champlain believed that by urging the settlers to hunt, fish, gather and barter, they would both receive the exercise he deemed necessary and bring to the table an adequate supply of fresh foods. His third objective was to establish a regular forum whereby the colonists could relax and enjoy themselves in congenial surroundings.¹⁷ Champlain saw the value of such gatherings as a means of promoting esprit de corps among the habitants and thus quell the rumblings of discontent and hints of mutiny that so concerned Lescarbot during the late autumn.¹⁸ Finally, the settlement's survival depended to a large extent

¹³Champlain, *Voyages*, p. 384.

¹⁴Morris Bishop, *Champlain: The Life of Fortitude* (Ottawa, 1968), p. 82.

¹⁵Again, only Champlain, de Champdore and de Fougeray elected to remain in New France.

¹⁶Unfortunately, the residents of Port Royal, unlike Cartier, were not aware of an Indian remedy for scurvy, that being spruce-needle tea. Arthur R. M. Lower, *Canadians In the Making: A Social History of Canada* (Toronto, 1958), p. 8.

¹⁷These three objectives are succinctly stated by Colby who records that Champlain, "mindful of former experiences, . . . (was) determined to fight scurvy by encouraging exercise among the colonists and procuring for them an improved diet. A third desideratum was cheerfulness." Charles W. Colby, *The Founder of New France: A Chronicle of Champlain* (Toronto, 1915), p. 52.

¹⁸Lescarbot, *History*, p. 115.

upon the continued goodwill of the local natives. Champlain was determined to foster this relationship for a number of excellent reasons. In the first place, to antagonize the Micmac could conceivably result in armed conflict, something that was to be avoided at all cost. In the second place, as Lescarbot clearly indicates,¹⁹ it was from these Indians that the settlement derived the majority of its pelts. It must be remembered that de Monts' monopoly was still in effect and although the colonists may appear to have spent the bulk of their time engaged in other activities, it was after all the fur trade that provided Port Royal with a *raison d'être*. By thus pursuing a policy of goodwill, the safety of the settlement could be guaranteed and the prospect of securing both furs and additional fresh fish, poultry and venison from the natives would be facilitated.

Champlain visualized L'Ordre de Bon Temps as a vehicle by which these objectives could be realized. When viewed in this light, it is hardly surprising that his compatriots heartily endorsed the proposed society.²⁰

What then was Champlain's L'Ordre de Bon Temps?²¹ It was very simply a social gathering of the Port Royal colonists and their native friends, whereby one evening every two weeks was set aside for a formal dinner complete with toasts, allocutions, singing and story telling. To guarantee a laden banquet table, a chain-collar was ceremoniously draped ". . . about the neck of one of our people, commissioning him for that day to go hunting. The next day it was conferred upon another, and so on in order. All vied with each other to see who could do the best, and bring back the finest game."²² Such was the rivalry that the hunters actually began foraging several days before their turn came.²³ The delicacies of forest and stream procured by the habitants, together with those supplied by their Indian friends, and the produce of the settlement's gardens, served to complement the wines and ordinary rations obtained from France.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 281.

²⁰Somewhat surprising, however, is the fact that contemporary Canadian historians have accorded little or no ink to L'Ordre de Bon Temps. To wit: Rosario Bilodeau, et al., *Histoire des Canadas* (Montreal, 1971), p. 41; Lower, *Canadians in the Making*, pp. 13-14; McInnis, *Canada*, p. 27; Careless, *Story of Challenge*, p. 37; and Marcel Trudel, *Histoire de la Nouvelle-France*, Vol. II (Montreal, 1966), p. 63, each mention it in the course of approximately three lines, while one searches in vain through Morton, Kingdom of Canada and Donald Creighton, *The Story of Canada* (Toronto, 1971).

²¹P. Erondelle (Lescarbot, *Nova Francia*, p. 117) has translated this as "the Order of Good Time" or "the Order Of Mirth," while H. H. Langton and W. F. Ganong (Champlain, *Voyages*, p. 447) and W. L. Grant (Lescarbot, *History*, p. 342) translate it as "the Order of Good Cheer".

²²Champlain, *Voyages*, p. 448

²³Loscorbat, *Nova Francia*, p. 117.

To the members of de Poutrincourt's table²⁴ fell the responsibility of ensuring the banquet's success, each in his turn serving as maitre d'hotel for the occasion. Utilizing the newly acquired skills of the colonists—skills that saw a carpenter produce charcoal and masons try their hand at baking²⁵—and the willing assistance of his dining companions, this person as chief steward supervised the preparation and distribution of the banquet dishes. Lescarbot provides a colourful account of these proceedings :

the Governor of the feast or Steward . . . having made the cook to make all things ready, did march with his napkin on his shoulder and his staff of office in his hand, with the collar of the order about his neck, and all . . . [of de Poutrincourt's table] following of him, bearing every one a dish. The like also was at the bringing in of the . . . [dessert] but not with so great a train.²⁶

Smacking his lips, Lescarbot continues by outlining a typical banquet menu; “. . . ducks, bustards, grey and white geese, partridges, larks, . . . moose, caribou, beaver, otter, bear, rabbits, wildcats, . . . [raccoons,] . . . sturgeon, . . .”²⁷ together with fruits, vegetables, fresh bread, pastries and wine. Truly a gourmet's delight and one that the colonists and their native guests must have anticipated with relish.

Between twenty and thirty natives joined the settlers on these occasions and considerable care was taken by the French to include them in the revelry. Indeed, the Micmac chief, Membertou, and other chiefs when they were in the vicinity, were invited to eat and drink with de Poutrincourt at the head table.²⁸ Owen describes the setting thus:

It must have been a brilliant spectacle, when in the long, low room, the firelight gleaming on the glasses and silver of the table, on the gentlemen in their slashed and laced doublets crusted with gold, on the bearded face of Membertou and the figures of his tawny followers, the wine and the pipe, with its bowl of a lobster

²⁴Isabella A. Owen, "Three Centuries of Society at Old Port Royal," *The Halifax Herald*, Saturday, 15 May, 1897, P. 9, claims that there were fifteen persons seated at this table. Although this figure cannot be substantiated, it is possible Louis Herbert and Daniel Hay may have sat at this table along with de Poutrincourt and his eldest son, Jean de Biencourt, Lescarbot, Champlain, de Fougeray, Robert du Pont-Grave (Francois du Pont Grave's son) and Pierre Angibaut, Sieur de Champodore. The identity of the others, if indeed others were present, has been obscured by time.

²⁵Lescarbot, *History*, p. 321.

²⁶Lescarbot, *Nova Francia*, p. 118.

²⁷Lescarbot, *History*, p. 343.

²⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 343-4.

claw and its tube decorated with porcupine quills, went round the merry company.²⁹

Even allowing for literary license the scene must have been a warming one. It is little wonder that such a setting, combined with excellent food and generous libations, would rouse the gaiety of the participants—Indian and Frenchman, commoner and gentlemen alike. Poems were intermingled with songs, tall-tales, and humorous quips ; in short, all the ingredients of an evening designed to ward off feelings of alienation and promote a spirit of camaraderie.

And so the evening flies apace—
 Old songs are sung, old stories told—
 Until the Master leaves his place,
 And, taking staff and chain of gold,
 Calls forth the Master who succeeds,
 Drains first with him the Loving Cup,
 Says, "In your hands we place our needs,
 And gives his badge of office up."³⁰

Thus, following a prayer of thanksgiving, the evening drew to a close with a final toast and the transfer of the order's collar to the succeeding chief steward.

The question can now be posed. Did this biweekly social gathering serve to meet the objectives visualized by its founder? One may attempt to answer this question by employing models of the type developed by Getzels³¹ and Maslow.³² Getzels' paradigm paths the way for an in depth analysis of the inter-relationships that develop between an institution and the individuals embraced by that institution. Consideration of the institution's *raison d'être* and its surrounding environment, together with the personalities, requirements (Maslow's "hierarchy of needs"³³) could well prove to be a useful tool in this respect), and cultural backgrounds of the individuals involved, may lead to a better understanding of the social system and the resultant behaviour of its members. Cheska,³⁴ who adopted this

²⁹The *Halifax Herald*, 15 May, 1897.

³⁰William McLennon, "L'Ordre De Bon-Temps Port Royal 1606," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, LXXXVI, No. 513 (February, 1893), pp. 395-396. McLennon, in the course of his poem provides samples of the type of verse that may have resounded throughout the community hall of Port Royal whenever L'Ordre assembled. *Ibid.*, pp. 393-396.

³¹Jacob W. Getzel, *et al.*, "A Model for Studying Behavior in a Social System", in *Educational Administration as a Social Process: Theory, Research, Practice* (New York, 1968), pp. 102-105.

³²Abraham Maslow, "A Hierarchy of Human Needs", in *Motivation and Personality* (New York, 1954), pp. 80-106.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴Alyce Cheska, "L'Ordre & Bon Temps — A Reaction." A paper presented at the Third Annual Convention of the North American Society for Sport History, Barton, Massachusetts, April 17, 1975, pp. 4-6.

approach, concluded that L'Ordre evolved as a functional device to cater to both individual and institutional needs emanating from the Port Royal social system, and in so doing, it played an important role in the actual survival of this micro-society.

Berkhofer,³⁵ however, reminds us that bias can easily enter into an historical analysis if we rely solely on ethnocentric models of this type. He suggests that considerable attention must also be given to the actors' interpretation of the situation for in his opinion a unified representation of past reality is a combination of the actors' and observer's level of analysis.³⁶ If we heed his advice we discover that Champlain also believed that L'Ordre served its purpose, for he states that ". . . everybody found [it to be] beneficial to his health, and more profitable than all sorts of medicine we might have used,³⁷—sentiments echoed by Lescarbot.³⁸

There appears to be little doubt that the diet of the habitants was upgraded, both in terms of quality and quantity, as a result of an improved trade-relationship between colonist and native, and the intra-group hunting rivalries stimulated by the establishment of L'Ordre. ". . . . At breakfast we never wanted for some modicum or other of fish or flesh," writes Lescarbot, "and, at the repast of dinners and suppers, yet less."³⁹ One is also left with the impression that the colonists engaged in far more physical exercise during the winter months than hitherto and that the morale of the colony remained high. We read, for example, of a group of settlers raising their voices in song while picnicking on the banks of a nearby river in the January sunshine.⁴⁰ This happy event may have never occurred had the French not deliberately cultivated the trust and friendship of the Micmac. Much of the uncertainty of pioneer life must have been removed knowing that the local natives ". . . . love Frenchmen, and would all, at a need, arm themselves for to maintain them."⁴¹

That these factors *alone* were responsible for the fewer incidents of illness⁴² and unrest reported during the winter of 1606-7, is a moot point. However, if they did contribute to the mental and physical well-being of the Port Royal colonists, and

³⁵Robert P. Berkhofer, Jr., *A Behavioral Approach to Historical Analysis* (New York, 1969), p. 73.

³⁶*Ibid.* Actors = habitants of Port Royal; Observer = Salter.

³⁷Champlain, *Voyages*, p. 448.

³⁸Lescarbot, *History*, p. 344, and Lescarbot, *Now Francia*, p. 119.

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 118.

⁴⁰Lescarbot, *History*, p. 346.

⁴¹Lescarbot, *Now Francia*, p. 119.

⁴²Accordin to Lescarbot, only four men died of scurvy during this relatively mild winter. *Ibid.*

the evidence seems to support this, then credit must be given where credit is due—to L'Ordre de Bon Temps and its creator, Samuel de Champlain.

The life of Champlain's original club was shortlived, as de Monts' monopoly was revoked with the arrival of summer and the colonists departed Port Royal for France in August 1607.⁴³ Although his monopoly was quickly renewed and Frenchmen set foot on Nova Scotian soil again within twelve months, L'Ordre was to exist in memory only for some three hundred and twenty-four years.⁴⁴ This poses an interesting question. If L'Ordre de Bon Temps were as enjoyable and as important in contributing to individual and communal survival as it appears to have been, why then did Champlain not revive it when he founded Quebec in 1608. Although an answer lies beyond the compass of this inquiry, I would hazard a guess and suggest that other social mechanisms evolved in response to the unique requirements of the Quebec social system. The exact nature of these ludic devices remain to be determined and may well serve as the focus of some future investigation.

⁴⁸Champlain, *Voyager*, p. 459.

⁴⁹On November 5, 1931, a group of leading citizens from Annapolis Royal decided to revamp on organization they had founded four years earlier. Their aims were twofold: to foster an interest in public affairs and cultural values and to revive and perpetuate the spirit and traditions of Champlain and his gay and gallant companions. The name selected for this organization? "The Order of Good Cheer."

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