

***Dictionary of Newfoundland English.* Edited by C.M. Story, W.J. Kirwin and J.D.A. Widdowson (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1982)**

Enoch Padolsky et Jan Pringle

Volume 5, numéro 1-2, 1983

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1081224ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1081224ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (imprimé)

1708-0401 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Padolsky, E. & Pringle, J. (1983). Compte rendu de [*Dictionary of Newfoundland English*. Edited by C.M. Story, W.J. Kirwin and J.D.A. Widdowson (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1982)]. *Ethnologies*, 5(1-2), 108-111.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1081224ar>

for the serious scholar, everything must be examined in any case. Much more important would be to indicate if musical transcriptions and illustrations are to be found in a given work. Though not intended, the coding of entries in this bibliography will make an interesting chapter in Canadian folkloristics, because of the careful differentiations among "authentic," "literary," "rewritten," and "reprinted" texts, among "most important," "less important," "good," and "valid" items, and between works designed for a popular audience or suitable for young people.

Second, ambiguous cases such as the Métis and Blacks might be better listed under "other cultural groups", rather than as Francophone and Anglophone, respectively — the political implications of such classifications are unfortunate, as the compilers acknowledge.

Third, if at all possible, it would be helpful to have more complete information on films and records, especially the filmmaker on record maker and the subject, where this is not clear from the title. I assume that in those cases where this information is lacking, it was simply not available. A list of videotapes would be a welcome addition.

A *Bibliography of Canadian Folklore in English* is an invaluable addition to the field. This comprehensive and expertly prepared volume is an indispensable tool for the study of Canadian folklore.

Barbara KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT
Tisch School of the Arts
New York University

Dictionary of Newfoundland English

Edited by C.M. Story, W.J. Kirwin and J.D.A. Widdowson
(Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982).

In 1956 when G.M. Story reported, after two years, to the St. John's branch of the Humanities Association of Canada¹ on some of the problems involved in putting out a "Newfoundland Dialect Dictionary," he still had 26 years ahead of him before the work was finally to appear. To these years of dedicated effort by Story we must add the major contributions of the co-editors W.J. Kirwin and J.D.A. Widdowson, all the work done by the many collectors and contributors listed over a number of pages in the Introduction, and no doubt many other contributors to collecting, editing, publishing, etc., who could not be listed. By all this effort, the initial list of 2,000 words available in the mid 1950's has grown to the 625 pages of the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English*, which represent, by the way, less than 50% of the items collected for the dictionary.

Most dictionaries, by their very nature, are built up at least in part on the basis of centuries of earlier lexicography. As a result, when a new dictionary appears that aims to be a complete dictionary of a language such as English, much of what has gone into the making of the dictionary is not new. Even so, reviewers who have any sense of what underlies a dictionary approach a review of such a work with considerable diffidence and humility: the chances are slim indeed of making more than vaguely appropriate comments about a work which may represent (as in the case of *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, for example) twenty years of work by a huge team of researchers building on the accumulation of over two hundred years of lexicographical scholarship.

In the case of a regional dictionary, the challenges to a reviewer are all the more daunting: the likelihood is that the only people in the world knowledgeable enough to review such a dictionary as the *Dictionary of Jamaican English* or the *Dictionary of Canadianisms on*

1. *A Newfoundland Dialect Dictionary: A Survey of the Problems*. St. John's, Newfoundland: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1956.

*Historical Principles*² are the people who worked on it. It is to this class of dictionaries that the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* belongs. The result is impressive indeed. Comparisons would be impertinent, but there is no doubt that this will prove to be among the very best scholarly dictionaries ever produced.

Like the editors of the *Dictionary of Canadianisms on Historical Principles*, the editors have adopted relatively broad criteria for what should be included in the dictionary. In addition to words which seem to have actually been originated in Newfoundland are those words "recorded first, or solely, in books about Newfoundland; words which are characteristically Newfoundland by having continued in use here after they died out or declined elsewhere, or by having acquired a different form or developed a different meaning, or by having a distinctly higher or more general degree of use" (p. xii). The *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* thus represents far more than a list of words created in Newfoundland: it is rather an attempt to represent a "regional word-stock," and among the factors used in selecting items were "the importance of the terms in the region's main occupations and traditional culture." The *Dictionary* is thus consciously designed to represent a balance of aspects reflecting the life, history, nature and geography of Newfoundland.

The kinds of decisions which such a design entailed for the editors of the *Dictionary* are spelled out in the Introduction (itself an important statement on lexicographic theory as well as a valuable short introduction to the history, culture and language of Newfoundland). A couple of examples will show the problems something of the problems they had to solve. The easy words are words like *gud*, a name for the northern

razor-bill (*Alca torda*) which is apparently unique to Newfoundland, or *outport*, which is clearly based on the British use of *outport*, recorded since 1642 as a term for any port other than London, but has a distinctive Newfoundland sense as "a coastal settlement other than the chief port of St. John's."

But what about *gob-stick*, the name for an implement used to remove a hook from the gullet of a fish that has swallowed it? This looks like an original Newfoundland creation, based of course on the more widely known *gob* "mouth." In fact, however, it isn't; the same term was used for the same implement by one of these reviewers in his childhood in New Zealand, and the chances are therefore that the original creation of the compound occurred in Ireland. However the justifications for the inclusion of the word are clear. In the first place, the very extensive searches carried out by the editors have not revealed the use of the expression anywhere else in the world, at least in print. So far as one can tell, therefore, the word first occurred in printed English in Newfoundland. And secondly, the word is unmistakably part of the distinctive vocabulary of one important area of Newfoundland's culture, the fishery.

Or what about *liver*, a term for a permanent settler in Newfoundland? In the form *liver*, this word has long been part of the common English wordstock in the sense of "dweller" or "resident." It is now archaic in standard English, but in various non-standard forms of English it is well known in various parts of the world. The form *liver* uses the same *-er* suffix, but adds it to a variant and in fact older form of the stem of the word *live*. There is nothing characteristically Newfoundland about either the form or meaning of the stem, nor the process of suffixation that added *-er* to it, nor

2. *Dictionary of Jamaican English*, eds. F.G. Cassidy and R.B. LePage. Cambridge: The University Press, 1967. *Dictionary of Canadianisms on Historical Principles*, ed. in chief Walter S. Avis. Toronto: W.J. Gage Ltd., 1967.

really the meaning of resultant forms *liver* and *livyer*. Both have been used in English for centuries. Moreover although the form *liver* is shown by the citations in the Dictionary to have appeared in writing as early as 1745 and in print by 1749, the form *livyer* does not seem to have been recorded before 1868. But it is clearly the case the *liver* or *livyer* persists in general use in Newfoundland after it has declined elsewhere in the English speaking world, and the choice of *livyer* rather than *liver* as the headword is equally clearly justified by the citations from modern Newfoundland sources, which suggest that *livyer* is by far the most current form nowadays. The kind of work which goes into gathering the data on which such decisions can be based, and the kind of care which goes into the making of the decisions, are such that, once again, a reviewer can comment only with a good measure of diffidence and in fact of awe.

The wide range of sources used is a major source of the strength of the Dictionary. They also increase its ultimate interest. Printed sources alone include a range from literary and historical writings to newspapers, pamphlets, ballads, charts and maps, and early glossaries. Some historical manuscripts were also scrutinized.

The major innovation in Canadian lexicography, however, and the one likely to be of most interest to folklorists, is the extensive use of orally collected source materials, which the editors have drawn on more, and more systematically, than the editors of any other extant dictionary of a regional variety of English. Fields records compiled by the editors or their fieldworkers over the years account for almost a fifth of the sources specified in the Dictionary. In addition, the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive was extensively used and accounts for almost 40% of listed sources. In the end, printed works, though the largest single type of source material used, make up only slightly more than 40% of listed sources.

The result is a dictionary which can rightly be claimed to display "a tenacious and robust oral culture" (p. xxvi). The other result is that the quotations under the entries are often a delight to read.

The presentation of items represents a compromise between completeness and the desire not to overlap with other major dictionaries. The editors have on the whole restrained their cross-listing, etymological notes and phonetic and spelling variants in order to give maximum space to the cited quotations from the varied sources they use. These quotations are, after all, the core of new materials the Dictionary has to offer; other sources such as the *Dictionary of Canadianisms*, the *Oxford English Dictionary* or the *English Dialect Dictionary* can easily be consulted by the reader for further information on items which are not unique to Newfoundland.

The *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* will undoubtedly be of immense usefulness to a whole range of interested scholars. It represents a major reference book for those working on Canadian English, its various regional dialects and of course the language of Newfoundland in particular. It will provide a wealth of material for those interested in studying the nature of lexical innovation, the retention of relic terms, the nature and essence of semantic change, etc. To those working in cultural history and folklore the extensive quotations from oral sources and the broad representation of Newfoundland occupational fields (fishing, seal hunting, household implements), topography, names for natural items (fish, birds, plants, etc.), weather, coastal and nautical fields, food and so on, should all prove invaluable.

It might seem strange for us to review this fascinating source for Newfoundland culture without giving at least a few examples, but we didn't know where to begin. After all, 625 pages of Newfoundland terms is a lot to cover. Perhaps our only bit of useful advice is as follows: Keep your pussels out of your bangbelly

and if you can't, don't get heatable — just use your header's mitt!

And we would strongly recommend that you start by reading the Introduction carefully, and looking up the words cited there. The Dictionary makes no concessions to the popular appeal of its subject; it is placed squarely in the central tradition of scholarly English lexicography. But as you look up the lists of words used to exemplify the points made, the wordstock will always tempt you further afield. The discussion of the coastal lexicon invites you to look up *brandies, ground, growler, gulch, ledge, run, sunker* and *tickle*. We lasted as far as *run*, which gives cross-references to *reach* and *rattle*; the search for *rattle* went astray when we encountered the noun *randy* on the previous page, and so we never got to *tickle* at all. Look it up yourself.

Enoch PADOLSKY
and Jan PRINGLE
Carleton University
Ottawa, Ont.

The Comfortable Arts: Traditional Spinning and Weaving in Canada

By Dorothy K. Burnham

(Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, National Museums of Canada, 1981.

xviii + 238 pp., introduction, bibliography, illustrations, photographs, \$19.95.)

In 1981 the National Gallery organized an exhibition under the direction of Dorothy K. Burnham that featured a wide array of traditional textiles from across the country. Although consisting primarily of handweaving such as coverlets, blankets and cloth, a sampling of other types of textiles was also included. To accompany this exhibition, an elaborate catalogue was prepared: *The Comfortable Arts*.

To any scholar researching Canadian textile traditions, the publications of Dorothy Burnham and her late husband, Harold, are standard reference works. Although being based at the Royal Ontario Museum has tended to limit the Burnham's field research to Ontario and Quebec, their publications have always attempted to at least touch on traditions in other parts of the country. Both as an exhibit and publication, *The Comfortable Arts* is no exception, with sections on textiles created by the French, Loyalists, Scots, Irish, English, Icelandic, Hutterite, Ukrainian and Doukhobor settlers, as well as by the Native Peoples. One of the book's limitations, however, was the fact that materials included for presentation could only be those already housed in existing museum collections. This was primarily because of constraints of time: Mrs. Burnham had only ninety days to traverse the country and secure artifacts for this exhibit. Thus, those geographic regions better researched by museums are more represented than those where fieldwork is only beginning.

The thematic organization of this catalogue most likely followed that of the exhibit, and is by ethnic group. This is far from ideal, given the early contact among various peoples. Divisions in the book, then, are quite arbitrary, and some classes of artifacts do not fit neatly into ethnic categories. For example, the initial chapter on the work of Native Peoples is followed by a section on braiding by Native Peoples and the French, and then by a chapter on French traditions. Since braiding is not clearly French or Native, this arbitrary section was needed. Other problems arise, for example, in trying to distinguish between what is a Loyalist tradition as opposed to a German or English practice. Indeed, some of the coverlets woven by Samuel Fry, an Ontario weaver who migrated from the Pennsylvania German region, are described in the Loyalist section, while a blanket of his is placed in the Scottish, Irish and English chapter. A simple organization by textile type, while not as trendy as