

Everywoman's Biography

The Stories of Marie Marguerite Rose and Jeanne Dugas at Louisbourg

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PRESENT AND PAST/PRÉSENT ET PASSÉ

Everywoman's Biography: The Stories of Marie Marguerite Rose and Jeanne Dugas at Louisbourg

PUBLIC HISTORY IS THE RESULT OF NEGOTIATIONS, OR STRUGGLES, among researchers, funders, presenters (or media), and the audience, all of whom have different claims to authority or reasons to participate in the discussion. Those producing history for government or publicly funded institutions are constrained to consider their institution's mandate as well as potential audience(s), and to make their messages appealing and accessible. Cultural critics foreground the impact of these limitations and of the expectations of the audience on the story told in public history.¹ If publicly funded history produced by government-run sites is expected to speak to the official collective identity, to represent the polity that produces the history, as well as to be appealing, these expectations weigh heavily on the history being presented. As Peter Hodgins and Nicole Neatby observed in the introduction to their recent work on public history, "Public communication is conservative in its most profound sense: in order to be broadly accessible or legible and believed, the public communicator often has no choice but to work within the restricted vocabulary of the 'already-known' and the 'commonsensical'."² Nonetheless, the public's relationship to its past, to information, and to communications technology has changed what is discussed and how it is discussed. What was "commonsensical" a generation ago may not be "commonsensical" today. Thus, public history is among the most important and most dynamic contexts within which interpretations of the past interact with the sensibilities of the present.

Within the constraints of official public history, how do researchers, presenters, and audiences bring about change, ask new questions, and challenge assumptions? By looking at the example of the presentation of women's history at the Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Site, run by Parks Canada, I hope to provide some insight into how this process can work, and illustrate the degree to which all participants in public history are agents in its production. Since living history was

1 A.J.B. Johnston, "Canada's Commemoration of Aboriginal History, 1867-2004," *Nashwaak Review* 22/23, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2009): 507-26; H.V. Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building: Pageantry and Spectacle at Quebec's Tercentenary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999) 11-13; Ronald Rudin, *Founding Fathers: The Celebration of Champlain and Laval in the Streets of Quebec, 1878-1908* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 3-10. Rudin also provides an excellent discussion of a process of constructing public memory in his *Remembering and Forgetting in Acadie: A Historian's Journey through Public Memory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009). The author wishes to thank the anonymous readers whose helpful comments and suggestions have contributed tremendously to this essay. She would also like to thank her colleagues at Parks Canada for sharing their experiences and for their commitment to public history.

2 Nicole Neatby and Peter Hodgins, eds., "Introduction," in *Settling and Unsettling Memories: Essays in Canadian Public History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 6.

Anne Marie Lane-Jonah, "Everywoman's Biography: The Stories of Marie Marguerite Rose and Jeanne Dugas at Louisbourg," *Acadiensis* XLV, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2016): 143-162.

first done at Louisbourg in the 1970s, questions posed by researchers, presenters, and visitors have brought about a profound change in how women were and are included in the history. One result of this change is the development and presentation of the biographies of two obscure 18th-century women: Jeanne Dugas (1731-1817), an Acadian born at Louisbourg who lived through the tumult of the second half of the 18th century and was among the founders of a new Acadian community, and Marie Marguerite Rose (1717-1757), an African kidnapped as a child in Guinea, sold as a slave at Louisbourg, and who, after being emancipated, ran her own inn. These women have come to be identified as vital to a complete and meaningful presentation of the history of the Fortress of Louisbourg, and both have been recently designated by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC) as persons of national historic significance. Marie Marguerite Rose was designated in 2009, and Jeanne Dugas's designation was announced in January of 2016. Neither of these women were heroines of a dramatic episode, such as Madeleine Verchères or Laura Secord, nor were they elite or educated, and therefore in a position to lead change; but their lives and actions have emerged as exemplary of aspects of our history that deserve to be remembered and presented.

That the stories of Dugas and Rose have come to serve as such examples is the result of a process of reconstructing biographies of these obscure “everyday” people from a range of sources in order to understand the significance of their lives and actions within a larger historical context. But the transition from a bare-bones biography stitched together from a number of sources, none of them created by the subject herself, to an appealing and accessible presentation involves a second process of the “reconstruction” of their lives in the context of a “living history” presentation. In constructing biographies of these women and placing their lives and choices in the context of their time, we need to be aware of the impact that the constraints of public history have on the stories we tell. Any such undertaking owes a debt to the seminal work of Natalie Zemon Davis 20 years ago in bringing three 17th century women vividly to life.³ Davis studied three women “on the margins,” not noble and not powerful and who were of different nations and religions, to consider the forces that drove their extraordinary life choices, the limits their gender imposed on their lives, and the measure to which they operated beyond these limits. The limits that circumscribed Rose and Dugas go far beyond lack of nobility and lack of access to power. One was kidnapped and enslaved, one was displaced by war. Both, to the best of our knowledge, were illiterate, and so their thoughts and their reflections on the events in their lives are forever beyond our reach. Their lives are recorded in a small number of official records, none of which they produced themselves. Nonetheless, the information we have allows us to see them as individuals and as agents in their own lives – able to contest the limits placed upon them – rather than as passive and powerless static types.

History “from the bottom up” has been practiced for more than two generations. It has shaped public school texts, popular histories, and film. Audiences expect to

3 Natalie Zemon Davis, *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1997). This study of Glikl bas Judah Leib, Marie de l'Incarnation, and Maria Sibylla Merian is a groundbreaking examination of bourgeois women and their complex roles in 17th-century western European society.

learn about ordinary people, men and women, and to have a story told from diverse perspectives. Stories in which privileged and powerful men, and sometimes their wives, were the only independent actors are no longer acceptable, by themselves, although they certainly still exist.⁴ The intention to consider the experiences and the actions of the everyday as well as the powerful, women as well as men, and members of non-dominant ethnic and cultural groups, has profoundly changed the work of researchers and presenters of history. At the Fortress of Louisbourg the opportunities and the challenges of addressing subaltern perspectives and complicating the grand narrative have inspired and at times frustrated researchers and presenters since the reconstructed site opened to the public.

Background: making a place for Marie Marguerite Rose and Jeanne Dugas

In the 1920s, the newly formed HSMBC had moved quickly to recognize the historic significance of the ruins of the 18th-century fortified French colonial town of Louisbourg. Their efforts were supported by an exhaustive history based on French documentation published in 1918 by John Stewart McLennan, a coal and steel executive. Although British imperial views of the military events dominated discussions at the time of Louisbourg's designation, from the outset there was a tension between the advocates of using the site to celebrate the British imperial narrative and those who wished to include the history of the French community in the discussions of Louisbourg and its commemoration.⁵ J.S. MacLennan's daughter Katharine served as the honorary curator of the site's museum from its opening in 1936 to the 1960s. Her work collecting objects connected with the history of Louisbourg and creating a carefully researched, detailed model of the town helped visitors to the ruins to understand the magnitude of the original community. While not ignoring the military events and powerful men associated with Louisbourg, she kept the civilian French community present in the interpretation of the site; as noted, for instance, by D.C. Harvey: "Miss McLennan has shown excellent taste and historic sense in presenting a very attractive exhibit to the visitor. As is fitting all effort has been directed toward recreating a picture of Louisbourg and its history without accentuating the ideas of conquered or conqueror. Both French and British alike may rejoice in this Museum."⁶ The work of both the McLennans led to many discussions of the possibility and desirability of a reconstruction of a representative part of the fortress.⁷ This idea seemed far from realization until it became central to the recommendation of the 1960 Royal Commission on Coal to respond to the crisis in the coal and steel industries. This grand cultural project would hire unemployed

4 Rudin, *Founding Fathers*, 226, and Sasha Mullally, "Democratizing the Past? Canada's History on the World Wide Web," in Neatby and Hodgins, *Settling and Unsettling Memories*, 235-66.

5 Louisbourg Pre-Reconstruction Files, RB 1, files 1-39, Louisbourg Archives, Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Site, Louisbourg, Nova Scotia. I thank Bennett McNutt for his work on these records.

6 D.C. Harvey to F.H.H. Williamson, 18 July 1937, Museum Correspondence, Louisbourg Museum file, James McConnell Memorial Library, Sydney, Nova Scotia. My thanks to Bennett McNutt for this reference.

7 C. James Taylor, *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Canada's National Historic Parks and Sites* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill Queens University Press, 1990), 175-6.

Cape Bretoners in its construction and then the site would become a centerpiece for the growing tourism industry, reinvigorating the beleaguered Cape Breton economy.⁸

That recommendation was taken up in 1961, starting an unprecedented federal make-work project to recreate part of the fortifications and a representative portion of the town of Louisbourg that coincided with the massive nation-building exercise of Canada's centennial. Its ambitious scale meant that Louisbourg broke new ground for the National Parks Branch, and for public history in Canada. Although the department had already been involved in two "reconstructions" – Port Royal prior to World War Two and, subsequently, Dawson City – these were different in terms of the cultural resources involved (archaeological remains and structures) as well as the scale of the intended final product. The process of defining the project and product of a reconstructed Louisbourg involved two conflicting visions of what a reconstruction should do. J.D. Herbert, the head of the historic sites division of the National Parks Branch, envisioned a reconstruction that would represent the physical condition of the town and fortifications over many years, including the era of its destruction by the British, to show process and change focusing on military events – specifically the 1758 defeat of the French. The approach of the engineers and planners favoured presenting a single era that would focus on the community, an approach that was criticized by Herbert and project archaeologist J. Russell Harper as artificial and static. Both parties were entrenched in the belief that the reconstruction could only accommodate one didactic purpose – one "lesson."⁹ In the first years of the Louisbourg project the historians and archaeologists gained some ascendancy, but the overall management remained with the engineers. The chosen approach was to present a selection of Louisbourg buildings at one "moment in time," focusing on the town and its grandeur rather than its fate.

Politicians expected that the Louisbourg project would make "a fairly spectacular showing" for Canada's centennial.¹⁰ In the era of the Quiet Revolution, the importance of the capacity of Louisbourg to celebrate "the two great cultures whose interplay made our nation possible" meant that the public servants who planned the historical presentation of Louisbourg preferred to emphasize the society and culture of the town rather than the political and military conflict that brought about its end.¹¹ In the 1972 *Interpretive Prospectus for the Fortress of Louisbourg*, Superintendent John Lunn mused about the desired impact of the reconstructed site on a visitor: "If we can help him understand life today in terms of the historical influences that have shaped it – if we can show him, even to a small degree, how life has evolved in the recent past and where it may be going – and if we can encourage even a few of our

8 Terry MacLean, "The Making of Public History: A Comparative Study of Skansen Open Air Museum, Sweden; Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia; and the Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Site, Nova Scotia," *Material Culture Review* 47 (Spring 1998), <http://journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/MCR/article/view/17734/22198>.

9 Taylor, *Negotiating the Past*, 177.

10 Taylor, *Negotiating the Past*, 179.

11 John Lunn, "Introduction," in *Interpretive Prospectus, April 1972, Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Park* (Ottawa: Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1971), vii.

visitors to reflect upon the flaws and merits of our forebears compared with us today, then we will have achieved much.”¹² Lunn did not appear to be invested in a textbook view of Canadian history that would tell visitors what had happened there. The visitor Lunn imagined doubtless was much like Lunn himself: male, white, middle-class, and Anglo Canadian. His intention, connected with the nation-building efforts of the federal government, had didactic purpose beyond the escapist exoticism associated with re-enactments or historic villages.¹³ Visitors were meant to learn and be challenged at Louisbourg, but the planners saw their visitors as blank slates rather than diverse individuals who had their own reasons for coming and their own expectations and curiosity. In the first decade of operation the excitement of the site being built dominated the press and an historical presentation developed that spoke of pivotal imperial events and of the past societies of both the French and British, addressing the social as well as the military past of Canada. Lunn also wrote: “The aim must be to provide as true a cross section of life as possible”¹⁴ The civic lesson he imagined did not speak to women, or First Nations, or African Canadians, but the approach of presenting community life in Louisbourg created a space within which all of these voices could eventually be heard.

As soon as buildings were constructed, it followed logically that people living in the past would inhabit them and carry the messages intended by the planning committees. Since the 1970s interpreters wearing period costume have provided an essential element of Louisbourg’s “living history” experience, giving visitors to the recreated environment the opportunity to interact with the past. At Louisbourg the opportunity to interact with “real people” inspired visitors to pose questions about individual experiences as well as larger historical processes, such as the conditions of everyday life for non-dominant groups, which led to curiosity among researchers and planners about aspects of history often not included in public presentations.¹⁵ The “living history” presentation approach led to a large program of research into of the details of the daily lives of Louisbourg’s citizens.¹⁶ Although this work gave the public history practiced at Louisbourg a reputation for “authenticity,” programers and presenters confronted challenges in trying to satisfy the curiosity of tourists without on one hand romanticizing or, on the other hand, fully inventing the life they presented or overly disrupting their experience with sad or disturbing details. In a tourism context, the desire to satisfy historical curiosity without disrupting holiday expectations of fun and entertainment increased the probability that the presentation

12 John Lunn, *Interpretive Prospectus*, April 1972, *Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Park* (Ottawa: Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1971), 8.

13 Rudin, *Founding Fathers*, 234.

14 John Lunn, *Interpretive Prospectus*, 25.

15 James Deetz, “A Sense of Another World: History Museums and Cultural Change,” *Museum News* 58, no. 5 (May/June 1980): 40-5; Jay Anderson, “Living History: Simulating Everyday Life in Living Museums,” *American Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (Fall 1982): 290-306; Michael Crang, “Living History: Magic Kingdoms or a Quixotic Quest for Authenticity?” *Annals of Tourism Research* 23, no. 2 (1996): 415-31; Gary Cross, “Crowds and Leisure: Thinking Comparatively Across the 20th Century,” *Journal of Social History* 39, no. 3 (Spring 2006): 651-50, <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/jsh/39.3/cross.html>.

16 Christopher Moore, “Preface,” *Louisbourg Portraits: Five Dramatic, True Tales of People Who Lived in an Eighteenth-Century Garrison Town* (Toronto: MacMillan, 1982), vi-ix.

would avoid ambiguity, complexity, or uncomfortable truths.¹⁷ This left the stories of slaves, of women, of Acadians and Mi'kmaq marginalized and minimized in the initial years of the presentation.

As the presentation program developed during the 1970s and 1980s, historians with Parks Canada focused on the work and lives of soldiers, fishermen, and townspeople – on the experiences of the everyday. Researchers compiled databases of the information from French parish and legal records, allowing them to readily generate demographic data to describe the community and to piece together basic biographies of Louisbourg residents for presenters. The costumed presenters portraying soldiers, artisans, and the elite at Louisbourg had, whenever possible, a name and a story so that they represented an individual rather than a generic type. In these cases, the bare-bones biographies of common people were fleshed out based on the general understanding of the society created by the data. For visitors the biographical details made the experience of interrogating the past more real, providing a point of entry into the past. The collection and analysis of this data not only revealed that Louisbourg was more diverse than simply “two founding nations,” but also that rich or middle class men leave better records. Researchers had difficulty reconstructing the lives of servants, particularly female servants, for whom even basic details, such as names, were difficult to locate. Even into the new millennium, the unequal representation of the stories of servants and of “lower class” women had been identified by staff and management as a shortcoming in the overall presentation.

The interplay of the interests and expectations of researchers, presenters, visitors, and the community led over the years to the search for stories that had been left out of the original presentation of Louisbourg. Black history, Aboriginal history, and women were among the subjects frequently raised as needing better research and interpretation. Mi'kmaq history, a subject beyond the scope of this essay that also merited better treatment in presentations, was the subject of study and programing development by B.A. (Sandy) Balcom and A.J.B. (John) Johnston among others. Research in all of these areas expanded considerably in the 1990s, but it took until 2011 to be formalized in the Management Plan for the Fortress of Louisbourg. That plan stated that a better representation of diversity, including women's history, was a priority: “The story of the role of women will be enhanced, and focused through the detailed knowledge of a few individuals with strong ties to the region, such as Marie Marguerite Rose and Jeanne Dugas.”¹⁸

Reconstructing lives: biography and commemoration

The allure of biography, for researchers and for audiences, is powerful. Delving into the details of one person's life offers historians and history enthusiasts the promise

17 Stephen Hornsby and Graeme Wynn, “Walking through the Past,” *Acadiensis* X, no. 2 (Spring 1981): 152-9; Ian McKay, “History and the Tourist Gaze: The Politics of Commemoration in Nova Scotia, 1935-1964,” *Acadiensis* XXII, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 102-38; D.A. Muise, “Who Owns History Anyway? Reinventing Atlantic Canada for Pleasure and Profit,” *Acadiensis* XXVII, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 124-34; Josette Brun, “Célébrations de l'histoire et pratiques de communication publiques : les “fêtes de la Nouvelle France de Québec en 2002,” *La Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 57 no. 1 (été 2003): 101-15.

18 Parks Canada, *Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Site of Canada Management Plan* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2011), 36.

of understanding “what life was really like” as well as the possibility of experiencing a moment of sympathy or appreciating an act of personal agency. Historical re-enactors describe the sensation as “touching cloth” – the feeling that one has really lifted the veil of time and physically connected with past experience. In his introduction to his biography of Louis IX, *Saint Louis*, Jacques Le Goff wrote of the intense, and normally politely concealed, desire to find in the record “the meaningful details craved by the vampiric historian who traffics in the fresh flesh of history too often refused him.”¹⁹ The challenge for researchers and presenters is to balance the emotional (possibly visceral) pull of biography with the appropriate academic rigour in order to engage the public with the results of a substantial historical analysis.

Marie Marguerite Rose

Marie Marguerite Rose and Jeanne Dugas were both residents of Louisbourg in the mid-18th-century. In fact, they lived across the street from each other at one point in their lives. They were both humble women of their time, but both survived and resisted, and to some degree overcame, the adverse conditions of their lives. Furthermore, circumstances resulted in the creation of a few exceptional records about them that have made it possible to reconstruct significant parts of their biographies two-and-a-half centuries later. The details of the life of Marie Marguerite Rose emerged from the mountains of documentation of Louisbourg when Ken Donovan, a now-retired Parks Canada historian, used the official correspondence, parish, and legal records of the French and the British to reconstruct the lives of more than 300 people who lived as slaves in 18th-century Île Royale (Cape Breton). He has published several articles on the history of slavery in Atlantic Canada and is working on a book on this important aspect of Canadian history.²⁰ In his study, Rose emerged as an exceptional subject to exemplify the courage and endurance of many people who were enslaved, to confront assumptions about slavery with surprising possibilities, and to represent as an individual the terrible reality of the practice of slavery in European colonies.

“Margueritte” was her French baptismal name; her own name was not recorded by the French.²¹ She was kidnapped from her home in Guinea, West Africa, when she was in her late teens and transported under brutal conditions to the French colonies, ultimately to Louisbourg. She was sold, probably in 1736, to Jean Chrysostome Loppinot, a French military officer who was also active in merchant trade at Louisbourg and who was married and the father of two young children. She remained part of the Loppinot household for almost 20 years, during which time her “mistress” had ten more children. Rose also had a son of her own, whose father was unnamed on the baptismal record. This boy, Jean, died at the age of 12 in 1751.

In his 2007 report for the HSMBC, historian Alain Gelly described Rose’s difficult life but recognized that, as harsh as it was, it was the experience of many

19 Jacques Le Goff, *Saint Louis*, trans. Gareth Evan Gollrad (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 93.

20 Kenneth Donovan, “Slaves in Île Royale: 1713-1758,” *French Colonial History* 5 (2004): 25-42.

21 Acte de baptême de Margueritte, une négresse âgée d’environ dix-neuf ans, appartenante au Sieur Jean Chrysostome Loppinot, 27septembre 1736, G1, vol. 406, registre IV, Louisbourg 1728-1738, fol. 63, Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer (ANOM), Aix, France.

Africans in the 18th century.²² What set Marie Marguerite Rose apart was her life after she was emancipated in 1755. She married a Mi'kmaw man, called Jean Baptiste Laurent by the French, with whom she ran an inn. Her property was inventoried by French officials at the time of her death in 1757, providing information about the nature of their business and how they functioned in the commercial world of Louisbourg. Rose's life raises many questions that the documents cannot answer: who was the father of her son, how did he die, how and why was she emancipated, how and why did she meet a Mi'kmaw man and marry him, how were Rose and Laurent able to rent the building for the inn, and what was her experience as a businesswoman in Louisbourg? A researcher of African-Canadian history, Graham Reynolds, has posed other, intriguing questions about her sense of her own identity in Louisbourg: whether she was able to retain and show any of her African heritage in the colony, and whether some of the enslaved Africans may have been able to come together as a small community and affirm their cultural identities as happened in other colonial settings.²³ As we dig further and push the sources for more insight into the lives of the disempowered in the colonial era, we must recognize that the few French documents that have immortalized Rose still only reveal a glimpse of her life as filtered through French administrative record keeping.

Donovan's work has opened a door to understanding other studies and documents that are connected to her story. An archaeological study analyzing the garbage in the well of the Loppinot house, where she lived as a slave, reveals an intriguing mix of imported and native plants. Since Rose was the principal domestic labourer in that household for 20 years, her knowledge and use of the various foods eaten were no doubt reflected in the contents of the well.²⁴ The garbage found there included pits and seeds of plums, apples, peaches, and cherries, all imports to Louisbourg, as well as local wild fruit: June berries, wild cherries, and the insipid but colourful bunchberry. Rose would have had to leave the walled town and venture into fields and the forest to find the berries eaten by the family, or secure these foods from people who had gathered them. The usefulness of some native berries would not have been obvious; they required preparation to be palatable. Rose either experimented or learned from someone with local knowledge about how to prepare them. The physical evidence of the well, mundane in itself, indicates the extent of Rose's learning and adaptation to her life as a slave of a French family in a northern colony, providing a glimpse of her connection with the physical environment.

Another document recently identified provides information about Rose's life when she was no longer enslaved. This is a letter that survived because it was undelivered: it was deposited in the British Admiralty court records as part of the record of a vessel captured by British privateers. In 1757 a Basque merchant, a client of her inn, wrote to Rose – "Madame Laurent, negresse" – instructing her to use the procuration that he had left with her in order to conclude business for him with

22 Alain Gelly, *Marie Marguerite Rose (vers 1717-1757)*, Parks Canada, Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada Report 2007-12, (Gatineau, Quebec: Parks Canada Agency, 2007).

23 Graham Reynolds, with Wanda Robson, *Viola Desmond's Canada: A History of Blacks and Racial Segregation in the Promised Land* (Black Point, NS: Fernwood Press, forthcoming).

24 John E. Dawson, "Seed Identification of Archaeological Seed from the Fortress of Louisbourg," Contract 77-166, file C1632, Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Site, Louisbourg.

another Louisbourg merchant, Monsieur Imbert. A procuration is a legal document authorizing one person to act on behalf of another in their absence. The letter writer chose Rose for a task that required business and negotiating skills – obtaining the profits from shares that he owned in a privateering venture with other Louisbourg merchants – indicating his confidence in her. He also communicated his warm regard for both her and her husband, concluding his letter with “Je vous prie de fere mes compliments a monsieur votre epous, Je vous souhette une parfette sente et je rest atendan Lonneur de vous voier votre tres humble serviteur”²⁵ The letter-writer went beyond the standard forms of epistolary salutations to express affection to both Rose and her husband. Compliments and wishes for good health occur in almost all letters, but awaiting the honour of seeing the addressee again was not a common formulation, and was in none of the other letters in the 1757 collection. To sign off as “servant” was most common, “humble servant” was a stronger sign of deference but still quite common, but “very humble servant” was quite unusual among people of a similar station.

Neither Rose nor her husband Laurent could sign their names.²⁶ It is possible that one or both of them may have learned to read, but not write, but that would raise the question of who might have taught them. They also may have employed the common strategy of the early modern illiterate of getting someone to write and read their letters for them. Also noteworthy is that the letter was addressed to Rose, but sends greetings to her husband. It was common for women to be involved in business in this period, but if both were available, normally the husband would be the primary point of contact. Overall, the letter indicates that Rose was a trusted and capable business contact of the author of the letter.

Donovan's examination of the business records from the 1757 inventory of Rose's estate revealed that both Rose and Laurent were actively and competently engaged in their business.²⁷ They purchased goods from Louisbourg merchants, including, but not limited to, Rose's former “master” Loppinot. They held money and receipts for third parties and they loaned money. Nothing in their practice of business was extraordinary except that the business records show that they both were legal actors: named in agreements and signing with their marks. It was very common in the early modern period for couples to be engaged in business, but according to the *Code de Paris* – the law of the French colonies – a married woman was a minor and therefore only her husband had legal authority to buy or sell and enter into agreements. Normally a woman's name would only be seen on a document if she were a widow, or her husband had given her a procuration to act in his absence.²⁸ Rose and Laurent both received goods, kept track of accounts owing

25 Pierre Lapouble to Mme Jean Baptiste Laurent, 26 février 1757, Letter 30, Public Record Office (PRO)/Admiralty 264-30, The National Archives (TNA), Kew, UK (transcribed as written).

26 Kenneth Donovan, “Slaves and their Owners in Ile Royale, 1713-1760,” *Acadiensis* XXV, no.1 (Autumn 1995): 3-32; Procès-Verbal de l'inventaire et vente des effets delaisés par la nommée Roze négresse, 27 aout 1757, G2, vol. 212, dossier 552, folio 2 verso and items 3 and 11, ANOM.

27 Procès-Verbal de l'inventaire et vente des effets delaisés par la nommée Roze négresse, 27 aout 1757, G2, vol. 212, dossier 552, ANOM.

28 Josette Brun, *La vie et mort du couple en Nouvelle-France: Québec et Louisbourg au XVIIIe Siècle* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 16-19.

for clients, entered into contracts, and paid their bills. They also attracted the trust and loyalty of their clients who had them hold receipts, represent their interests, and handle substantial sums of money. Rose's and Laurent's unusual sharing of responsibility indicates that the business community of Louisbourg responded differently to this couple in business than most: they saw the two as equal.

Among the items of Rose's inventory – provisions for her inn, the products of her garden, her clothes, and clothes she was making – were two objects that indicate a relationship to written expression and text. She owned a classic cookbook of contemporary French cuisine, *Le Cuisinier Royale et Bourgeois*, a rare item in the colonies at the time, and an *écritoire* made of horn, a rather expensive writing set. Literacy has many possible types and levels. As discussed above, in the early modern era different levels of literacy and different strategies were used to deal with text. Rose's possession of these objects suggests the possibility of some level of literacy, despite her signing with a mark – an “x” – but certainly does not prove it. Rose demonstrated well-developed business skills with her considerable circle of suppliers and clients, in the handling of money, and being trusted by the letter-writer to settle the shares for a privateer. Together her diverse and complex activities raise the possibility that her understanding of trade predated her emancipation in 1755.

The story of Rose's remarkable life immediately stood out among those researched by Donovan, leading to her presentation at Louisbourg and her designation as a person of national historic significance in 2009. The nomination to the HSMBC came about through a Parks Canada program put in place in the early 2000s to engage with communities to identify potential nominations that would help to achieve a system of commemorations that better represented Canada's history as described by the *National Historic Sites of Canada System Plan*, published in 2000. The plan, the first since 1981, was meant to “ensure that the system of National Historic Sites of Canada reflects the country's evolving history and heritage.” It named as priorities that the history of Aboriginal peoples, women, and ethno-cultural communities be better represented, and that Canadians have more access to the process of designation.²⁹ A long consultative process and many thematic history workshops in the 1990s had preceded the plan and laid the groundwork for a new approach to commemoration, which opened the door to nominations such as those of Marie Marguerite Rose and Jeanne Dugas.³⁰ Rose's nomination was first put forward by Pam Newton of Sydney at a community meeting on women's history in 2004. Rose was designated as a person of national historic significance in 2009 and, since then, two interpretive panels have been placed on the site of her inn at Louisbourg along with the HSMBC plaque, providing a high-profile and permanent place for the Rose's story at Louisbourg.

Jeanne Dugas

The work around the 2000 HSMBC System Plan was also part of the process that resulted in Jeanne Dugas's story being the subject of presentations at Louisbourg.

29 National Historic Sites of Canada: System Plan (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 2000), 5, 8, <http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/docs/r/system-reseau/sites-lieux1.aspx>.

30 Minutes, Spring 1999 meeting, Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, Hamilton, Ontario, 10-15 June 1999, pp. 2-3, Parks Canada Agency, Ottawa.

Dugas was the daughter of a carpenter and his wife from Port Royal (Annapolis Royal) in Acadia, who had brought their family to Port Toulouse in Île Royale (St. Peter's, Cape Breton) after Acadia became a British possession in 1713. The family moved to Louisbourg in the 1720s. Jeanne was their youngest daughter, born in Louisbourg in 1731. She was five years old when Marie Marguerite Rose arrived as a slave in the house across the road. There had been a slave in Jeanne's family's household but she never knew him; he died, along with Jeanne's father and two of her sisters, during a smallpox epidemic that swept the town when she was an infant. Jeanne lived in the cosmopolitan port town of Louisbourg until she was about 10-12 years old. Her family moved back to mainland Nova Scotia/Acadia, possibly to avoid the coming strife as war approached in the mid-1740s; this move began what would be for Dugas a lifetime of peregrinations that took in the entire Maritime region: avoiding war, fleeing expulsion, being captured and imprisoned, resettling, and then re-resettling again. The journey for Jeanne and her husband, Pierre Bois, ended more than 40 years later, in 1785, when they were among "les quatorze vieux" – the founders at the Acadian village of Chéticamp in western Cape Breton.³¹

Jeanne's experience was like that of many Acadians who managed to evade deportation; what makes her experience exceptional is that she recounted it to Monseigneur Plessis, the Bishop of Québec, who visited Chéticamp in 1812. He wrote about meeting her and the story she told him in a pastoral letter:

Chose remarquable dit Monseigneur, j'ai rencontré à Chétican, isle du Cap-Breton, au mois de juillet 1812, Jeanne Dugast, âgée de 80 ans, veuve de Pierre Bois, laquelle m'a dit être née à Louisbourg, avoir été de là à l'Acadie, au lieu nommé le Grand Pré (Horton), puis être revenue au Cap Breton, puis avoir demeurée à l'île Saint-Jean (Prince Edward Island), ensuite à Remshic en Acadie (Wallace, Nova Scotia), puis encore au Cap-Breton, de là encore à Remshic, puis à l'île Saint-Jean pour la seconde fois, puis une troisième fois à Remshic, de là à Restigouche, de Restigouche à Halifax, de là à Arichat, puis aux isles de la Madeleine, puis à Cascapédia, et de Cascapédia à Chétican, et ne s'être jamais couchée sans souper.³²

Dugas's odyssey of over 40 years of flight and displacement was succinctly summed up in this laconic paragraph, listing 14 displacements but concluding with a (I think) proud, perhaps defiant, summation: "[We] never went to bed without supper."

The story of Jeanne Dugas first came to my attention through a heritage presenter at Louisbourg, Robert Deveau, who is one of her descendants. On his suggestion I included her story in a presentation about links between Louisbourg and Acadian

31 Père Anselme Chiasson, *Chéticamp: Histoire et Traditions acadiennes* (Moncton, NB: Éditions des Aboiteaux, 1961), 29-31.

32 Mgr. Henri Têtu, *Visites Pastorales par Mgr. J. Octave Plessis, év. de Québec : voyage de 1815* (Quebec: n.p., 1903), 176 (note), in Chiasson, *Chéticamp*, 30. I analyzed this text in comparison with other examples of Acadian women's written expression in Anne Marie Lane Jonah, "Speaking for Herself? Acadiennes Communicating Identity in 18th-century Île Royale," in *Interrelations femmes-médias dans l'Amérique française*, ed. Josette Brun, Collection: Culture française d'Amérique (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2009), 41-62.

history for 400th anniversary of the first French settlement in North America in 2004. Her story came up again at a community meeting for women's history organized through the HSMBC program to encourage new designations, and was explored with interested local historians and heritage workers at another community meeting in Cheticamp in 2010. Dugas's story is well known in that area, as Father Anselme Chiasson had included her 1812 account of her life in his popular history of the Acadian community published in 1961. The community was confident of her importance beyond their tiny village, and Napoléon Chiasson agreed to write a letter to the board on behalf of the local historical society nominating her to the HSMBC. As well as the nomination, many were interested in her story becoming part of the presentation at Louisbourg or linked to its presentation to better reflect the connections between the modern Acadian community in Cape Breton and the fortress. The Dugas family home, where she was born, had been reconstructed at Louisbourg, but it serves as staff offices.

Much of her story had been researched by the Acadian genealogist Stephen White, who pieced together the routes and reasons for Dugas's many moves,³³ as well as by Nathalie Ouellette, who has written an excellent report on her life and its significance to Canadian history for the HSMBC.³⁴ Once again we have far more questions than answers about what her life was like as she and her husband struggled to survive and remain in the region and to find a secure home. We know that Jeanne's brother had been paid by the French to operate a transport for fleeing Acadians and Mi'kmaq from Remshic on the northern shore of mainland Nova Scotia into French territory of Île Saint-Jean at the time that she was in that area.³⁵ We also know that her husband, Pierre Bois, was part of the Acadian militia in Île Royale that joined forces with the company led by Charles Deschamps de Boishébert and continued to resist the British in the region after the fall of Louisbourg; indeed, in 1757 Pierre bought a musket from the estate sale of Marie Marguerite Rose.³⁶ But we can only imagine her role in these historical moments. In 1760, she and her husband were among a group of refugees at Restigouche, in today's northern New Brunswick. A French naval captain who had failed to reach Montréal and took refuge in the Restigouche River reported "J'ai trouvé dans ce Sejour de Misere plus de mille cinq cents ames Extenué de nanisions [sic – possibly inanitions] et mourant de faim ayant été obligé de manger des peaux de Castore pendant tout l'hiver."³⁷ The years of flight and displacements also included capture in New Brunswick and imprisonment on George's Island in Halifax Harbour. In her account to the bishop, Dugas had not said how meager supper sometimes was.

33 Stephen White, "Le Périple de Jeanne Dugas," *Contact-Acadie*, no. 18 (décembre 1991): 22.

34 Nathalie Ouellette, *Jeanne Dugas (1731-1817)*, Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, Report 2012-06 (Ottawa: Parks Canada Agency, 2012).

35 Bordereau de la recette et dépense faites à l'île Royale, 13 septembre 1751, MG1, C11C, folio 123, Library and Archives Canada (LAC), <http://collectionscanada.gc.ca>.

36 Procès-Verbal de l'inventaire et vente des effets délaissés par la nommée Roze négresse, 27 août 1757, G2, vol. 212, dossier 552, folio 23 verso, ANOM.

37 Citing Captain D'Angeac, May 1760, in Judith Beattie and Bernard Pothier, "The Battle of the Restigouche," *Occasional Papers in Archaeology and History* 16 (Ottawa: Indian and Northern Affairs, 1977), 14.

Although researchers were able to piece together the places Dugas named in her account and can infer why she was there, we cannot answer what she and her family did to survive, and how they coped with the deaths of at least two of their children, of other family members, and of friends during the years of pursuit and flight. We do know that there were Mi'kmaq at Remshic/Tatamagouche and at Restigouche,³⁸ and that during the years of flight the Acadians sometimes stayed with the Mi'kmaq, but without first-hand accounts of how this relationship worked this part of the story remains obscure.

Telling their stories: biography and public history

In the detective work that is carefully piecing together the life of an obscure person, researchers thrill at finding documents directly connected to them: an inventory of an estate with a precise description of a necklace or a name on a census. However, communicating the importance of these scraps of information to the general public presents a separate challenge. Compared to complete and sympathetic portrayals created in literature and film – Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Evangeline*, published in 1847, or Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes*, published in 2007 – is it possible to generate the same sense of connection? Can we create an inspiring and challenging presentation from an incomplete biography, with many unanswered questions, or is literature perhaps a better means to create a strong connection to a historical person? In the case of *Evangeline*, Acadian scholars have debated the value and role of Longfellow's work in communicating the story of the Deportation to a large audience. Contrary to Jeanne Dugas – a real, complex, and tough Acadian woman – what value does the story of passive, pious, long-suffering, uncomplaining *Evangeline* have?³⁹ Although the romantic Victorian heroine leaves much for a 21st-century critic to desire, Barbara LeBlanc argues that Longfellow's work made a valuable contribution to the rebirth of the Acadian community by creating a "mythe identitaire" at a time when Acadian history had been entirely hidden and dismissed.⁴⁰ In the 20th century Antoinine Maillet created a vivid amalgam of history and fiction with her publication of *Pélagie la Charette* in 1979. Her work was not "un simple roman historique, mais une histoire Romanesque."⁴¹ In another work Maillet wrote "Votre histoire est beaucoup plus vraie que toutes celles qui sont enregistrées aux archives nationales d'Halifax ou d'Ottawa. Parce qu'il n'y a rien d'aussi vrai que le vivant. C'est pourquoi la littérature orale, qui se transmet de bouche en oreille, est peut-être plus vraie que l'autre."⁴² The emotional and popular impact of these literary figures is difficult to compare to the real women

38 Bordereau de la recette et dépense faites à l'île Royale, 1751, MG1, C11C, LAC; Beattie and Pothier, "Battle of the Restigouche."

39 Ronald Rudin, *Remembering and Forgetting in Acadie*, 251-2.

40 Barbara LeBlanc, "Évangéline: L'Émotion devenue mythe," *Continuité: Le Patrimoine en Perspective*, no. 61 (été 1994): 21-4.

41 Kathryn J. Crecelius, "L'Histoire et Son Double dans *Pélagie La Charrette*," *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études de littérature canadienne* 6, no. 2 (1981): n.p., <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/SCL/article/view/7963/9020>.

42 Antoinine Maillet et Rita Scalabrini, *L'Acadie pour quasiment rien, guide historique, touristique et humoristique d'Acadie* (Ottawa: Leméac, 1973), cited in Crecelius, "L'Histoire et Son Double dans *Pélagie La Charrette*."

we are studying, but nonetheless the literary figures may provide visitors a frame of reference for understanding the more complex and incomplete stories we glean from the documents. The difficulty modern readers have with 19th-century characters such as Evangeline and those in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, published in 1852,⁴³ demonstrates the pitfalls of literary representations of past experience. Both literature and public presentations of history are rooted in the moment they are created; but whereas a work of literature remains as it was written, public history can be, and should be, revisited, re-examined, and perhaps rewritten.

Historian Nina Rattner Gelbart questioned her own efforts to write a biography of a very private woman, Madame du Coudray, the French Royal midwife in the mid-18th century: "What if the very process of confronting and even lamenting what cannot be known leads to intriguing reflections on the craft of history, or the strange conceit of believing that we can ever recover the past? . . . Questions start seeming as valuable as answers."⁴⁴ Whether we speak of Rose or Diallo, Dugas or Pélagie, it is perhaps a dangerous conceit to believe that we can ever completely understand a historical person. That is the point at which we stop asking, or accepting, questions. In the cases of Marie Marguerite Rose and Jeanne Dugas, a few documents illuminate moments of their lives. We can analyze these in the context of social structures and political events that they were powerless to make or change, but we cannot fairly extrapolate from the evidence their motives or personal opinions about their social context. When the documents do not provide answers, we try to imagine plausible motivations for the choices we know they made and plausible reactions to the circumstances of their lives. In the context of public history, this situation creates the challenge of how one signals what is information found in the record and what is interpretation. With interpretation, the forces of conservatism that govern public presentations become a concern. The need to appeal to the audience, and to conform to the expectations of the institution presenting the history, restrain our interpretations. We infer how these women felt about their husbands, their children, and people in power around them, creating fictional motivations for their actions and responses to the events in their lives. In a public presentation context, we make these inferences as conservative and inoffensive as possible.

As we reconstruct the lives of these two women, we must consider whether focussing on the individual histories of obscure people, who had so little authority in the creation of the records of their existence, does them justice and truly helps us to better understand the history they represent. Lara Putnam observes in her study of microhistory and Atlantic History that individual life stories as "telling examples" are only useful when they are evidence of a circumstance or possibility about which there has been a strong presumption of impossibility.⁴⁵ Certainly the lives of Rose and Dugas challenge assumptions about women in the 18th century, about slavery in

43 Constance Backhouse, "'I Was Unable to Identify with Topsy' – Carrie M. Best's Struggle Against Racial Segregation in Nova Scotia, 1942," *Atlantis* 22, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 1998): 16-26.

44 Nina Rattner Gelbart, "The Monarchy's Midwife Who Left No Memoirs," *French Historical Studies* 19, no.4, Special Issue: Biography (Autumn 1996): 997-1023.

45 Lara Putnam, "To Study the Fragments/Whole: Microhistory and the Atlantic World," *Journal of Social History* 39, no. 3 (Spring 2006): 615-30.

Canada, and about the Acadian odyssey. They both demonstrate how individuals with so little power still resisted the limits imposed upon them and the actions taken against them. Micro-historian Giovanni Levi asserted that biography could be “the ideal place for verifying the interstitial and nevertheless important character of the freedom that agents have at their disposal, and for observing how normative systems function in concrete situations that are never exempt from contradiction.”⁴⁶ Biographies such as those of Dugas and Rose are solid foundations on which to build a re-assessment of presumptions about the roles of women and of disempowered people in the past.

Although the methods of social history had already substantially challenged many assumptions about the agency of the subaltern, the use of biography leads to a more nuanced and accessible understanding of the history of the marginalized. Robin Law, studying the slave trade, observes: “Quantitative data provide context in which individual experience can be better understood but, do not convey much sense of that experience.” Even though individual accounts, such as the slave biographies he studied, are so few they cannot be representative, they still have value in that they can be considered against the context of a quantitative study, whether they are typical or exceptional, and can serve to “flesh out the dehumanised statistics of the databases.”⁴⁷ Erna MacLeod, in considering efforts to introduce non-dominant voices to the presentation of the Fortress of Louisbourg, proposes that “fragments and details from a variety of perspectives . . . [allow us to] negotiate more inclusive, self-reflexive individual and collective identities that encourage us to engage with conflict and appreciate cultural differences as qualities to be celebrated rather than assimilated.”⁴⁸ The social and demographic research prepared on Louisbourg demonstrates the complexity of the community and the inadequacy of the “two founding nations” narrative. Historians have pushed their research beyond the most readily available records, such as official correspondence, to be able to go past the traditional political history engrained with power, wealth, and gender biases. The biographies of Rose and Dugas function within the presentation of Louisbourg to complicate it, and to offer an accessible point of entry into some more difficult aspects of our history. The value of focussing on individual biographies in public presentations is borne out by the findings of the “Pasts Collective,” whose surveys on Canadians’ connections to the past confirmed that individual narrative, whether in movie or written form or as family history, provides a point of connection and entry into the larger story.⁴⁹ These women also stand on their own as individuals who should be remembered in our collective Canadian history for what they accomplished and what they represent.

46 Le Goff, “Introduction,” *Saint Louis*, xxvi, citing Giovanni Levi, “Les usages de la biographie,” *Annales, Économies, Sociétés, Civilizations* 44, no. 6 (1989): 1325-36.

47 Robin Law, “Individualising the Atlantic Slave Trade: The Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua of Djougou (1854),” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, vol. 12 (2002): 113-140, quotation on 116 and see also 120.

48 Erna L. MacLeod, “Decolonizing Interpretation at the Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Site,” in *Canadian Cultural Poesis: Essays on Canadian Culture*, ed. Garry Sherbert, Annie Gérin, and Sheila Petty (Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2006), 361-80.

49 Margaret Conrad et al., *Canadians and their Pasts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 16, 157.

Telling the stories of Rose and Dugas introduced two non-dominant perspectives to the presentation of Louisbourg, fulfilling the current priority that the presentation of history be diverse and inclusive. Yet many, including the front line staff who portray the individuals and tell the stories, initially were concerned about disturbing visitors' holidays with uncomfortable truths about Canada's history. Even if diversity is a stated objective, the living history presentation method that requires programers, supervisors, and the individuals representing uncomfortable history to broach difficult subjects or tell unsettling stories places a tremendous burden on the presenter. If their stories could not be integrated into the overall presentation there was a risk that they might be reduced to anecdotal asides disconnected from the larger narrative, which, as MacLeod notes, "rather than revolutionizing history . . . suggest[s] a new form of tokenism that perpetuates European patriarchal hegemony."⁵⁰ The question remains as to whether the end result of the research and presentation of these biographies leads visitors to reflect upon the significance of these lives, and therefore on the history and struggles of marginalized peoples, or merely offers a token representation in a safe package.

Being Marie Marguerite and Jeanne

At a living history site individual staff members take on the role of animating historical persons – presenting their history directly, dressed to represent them. This approach places the interpretive staff in a uniquely personal and authoritative position relative to the biographical story. The complex interplay of the layers of authority and meaning in living history presentations and their implications for heritage workers have been the subject of anthropological work in recent years. The level of personal emotional risk in creating a historic persona, particularly a subaltern persona, is also perceived as a potential labour issue.⁵¹ To try to better understand what presenting these particular women asked of presenters, I spoke with my colleagues, Parks Canada employees at the Fortress of Louisbourg, who have been involved in the portrayal of Rose and Dugas.

Missy Kirton, who has been part of the presentation of slavery at Louisbourg since 1998, Gisèle Beaudry, who has worked at Louisbourg since 2008 and has portrayed Jeanne Dugas, and civilian animation supervisor Myrtle Skinner all shared with me their views on how the presentations of these biographies have played out at the Fortress of Louisbourg. Kirton indicated that when she first worked on the slavery presentation she was uncomfortable with being the only person of colour on the staff and presenting such difficult history. She valued the time that Donovan invested in teaching her about the history of slavery and sharing and discussing his research, which she feels gave her confidence in what she was doing. At first she wore a modern guide's uniform and conducted a tour of the reconstructed portion of Louisbourg, telling stories of individual slaves connected with buildings. She

50 MacLeod, "Decolonizing Interpretation," 363.

51 Amy M. Tyson, *The Wages of History: Emotional Labor on History's Front Lines* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013). Although not a definitive work on this subject, Tyson broaches the important question of the impact of "emotional labour" on the presenters of difficult histories. Thanks to Amy McDonald for the reference.

reported that she “loved” giving that tour as she had so much to present, and visitors were very surprised as they had not known that there had been slaves at Louisbourg.

Later Kirton’s approach to presentation was changed: she was assigned to wear an 18th-century servant’s costume and present a female slave in a household. For a time she was also assigned a monologue, a memorized theatrical presentation in the voice of Rose. Although this presentation gave visitors the impression of direct experience of the historic person, it took away Kirton’s authority, as she spoke memorized lines, and the audience lost the opportunity to interact as they could not ask questions during the performance/presentation. This presentation was dropped as it was judged to be difficult to program because of its length and the need for a dedicated venue. Kirton has also portrayed Rose while wearing a “middle class” dress – in good condition, made of better but not luxurious fabrics, and of a flattering but practical cut – designed by textile curator Elizabeth Tait based on the clothing described in Rose’s inventory. Tait’s work in costume research and curation allowed the portrayal of Rose to further complicate expectations that a woman of her race and background would appear to be poor. Kirton likes this costume but feels uncomfortable wearing it as Rose’s inn was not reconstructed so she has nowhere to “be” and nothing she can do while wearing it. Her concerns demonstrate the need for physical supports, a setting, to provide context for the portrayal of an unexpected subject, an African businesswoman in an 18th-century French colonial town. Without other supports for communicating the complex details of Rose’s life, the costume alone places a heavier burden on the interpreter.

Kirton observed that when students worked with her giving the slavery presentation, based on available funding, they had difficulty feeling pride about and connection to the history they presented. With Kirton’s encouragement, they developed a better understanding of the importance of what they were presenting and felt more comfortable portraying slaves or talking about slavery at Louisbourg. Although there were many logistical challenges to consistently offering an interpretation of slavery and Rose’s life, Kirton feels that recent material supports, such as an HSMBC plaque at the site of Rose’s inn, and interpretive panels with it that tell Rose’s life story, improve the overall interpretation because when visitors come to her they are prepared for her story. Although Kirton recognizes the considerable gaps in our understanding of Rose’s life, and the challenges of making the story consistently available to visitors, she highly values her responsibility to tell the story of Rose and of slavery. She feels that being in the physical environment, in the clothing of the time, inspires her and visitors to Louisbourg to reflect on what slaves’ lives were really like. She summed up: “It’s an honour to portray this woman.”⁵²

Rose’s story has also gone beyond Louisbourg. The Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) Hall and Museum in Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, which commemorates a moment in the history of black activism in North America, strongly supported the work to include African Canadian history at Louisbourg, and also included the story of Rose in their own presentation. Rose’s story appeals to

52 Missy Kirton and Myrtle Skinner, interview by author, 26 June 2014, Louisbourg, author’s notes, personal files.

novelists and poets, many of whom choose to include Rose as a character or as the subject of their works to communicate the complex cosmopolitan setting of Louisbourg.⁵³ Nova Scotia's poet laureate, Shauntay Grant, inspired by the story of Rose, created a spoken word performance that she describes as a "song/prayer," speaking directly to Rose as a modern African Canadian woman. This performance was given at a special event at the fortress in 2013, and at an International Women's Day celebration in Sydney in 2014. For Grant it remains a deeply personal piece, one that she is not yet prepared to fix as a written publication.⁵⁴ As Parks Canada staff continue to strive to present the complex and emotional story of Rose, the power of her story transcends the walls of the fortress and traditional ideas of public history.

Gisèle Beaudry, who has portrayed Jeanne Dugas for special events, shared with me her experience of connecting with the role of Dugas. Before coming to Louisbourg she had not known much about the history of Acadians nor had she been interested in it, but she began to feel a strong connection to Louisbourg once she began to work there. She learned about the history of Cape Breton Acadians and Jeanne Dugas through her sister, and her family was excited when they understood through her sister's research that Dugas was their ancestor. Beaudry said she felt proud to portray a Louisbourg servant, her usual task, but when she was Jeanne "it was such a beautiful feeling." She learned the role for a special "Acadian Day" presentation as part of the Louisbourg300 celebrations, and she also portrayed Dugas for a CTV interview and has told her story at a promotional event in Montreal. She feels that she would like to do an Acadian tour or presentation more regularly.⁵⁵ The life of Jeanne Dugas has been the subject of other presentations outside of the Louisbourg National Historic Site as well. Cassie Cahoon, a Montreal writer who is also a descendant of Dugas, wrote a historical novel based on the life of Dugas, *Jeanne Dugas of Acadia*.⁵⁶ Cahoon chose to portray Dugas as part of her book promotion in Chéticamp in 2012. A student theatre troupe included the character of Dugas in a promotional presentation for Louisbourg's tercentennial in 2013, and Paul Gallant wrote a play based on her life, a play that was presented in 2014 at the Festival de l'Escaouette in Chéticamp. The *Inverness Oran* reviewer wrote of the performance: "History can seem austere, a lifeless cumulation of timelines and maps, but in that theatre, it felt private, personal, and alive."⁵⁷

Both Kirton's and Beaudry's experiences and perspectives have been shaped by their personal connection with the history, a connection that lends authority and authenticity to their presentations.⁵⁸ When these subjects were first introduced, the prospect of talking about Acadian history and slavery at Louisbourg generated discomfort among some guide staff who led tours and gave a general introduction to

53 Daniel Marchildon, *Le Sortilège de Louisbourg* (Ottawa: Éditions David, 2014).

54 Shauntay Grant, personal communication, 27 April 2014.

55 Gisèle Beaudry, interview by author, 15 May 2014, Louisbourg, author's notes, personal files.

56 Cassie Cahoon, *Jeanne Dugas of Acadia* (Sydney, NS: Cape Breton University Press, 2013).

57 Rebecca Silver Slayter, "Jeanne d'Acadie première a tour de force," *Inverness Oran* (Inverness, NS), n.d., <http://www.invernessoran.ca/entertainment/143-jeanne-d-acadie-premiere>.

58 Graham Carr, "Rules of Engagement: Public History and the Drama of Legitimation," *Canadian Historical Review* 86, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 329.

the site. As well as their concern about disrupting holidays with sad stories, in the case of an Acadian tour prepared for the 2004 Congrès mondiale acadien there was anxiety expressed about presenting one aspect of local history to an informed audience who might have prior knowledge and expectations. Those who did not have a personal connection to the history feared being challenged and questioned. Unlike Kirton and Beaudry, they felt less authoritative talking about this history linked to the present. These anxieties were not borne out in public responses to either Acadian or African Canadian presentations, but they do reflect the process and challenges of negotiating authority in the context of an historic site.

These changes in presentation and commemoration at Louisbourg as reflected in the portrayals of the lives of Rose and Dugas were in response to changes in audience values and expectations of history as well as to evolving cultural theory and historiography. In reflecting on their experiences with programs presenting subaltern history, both Kirton and Skinner observed that the response today is significantly different than when they began in the 1990s. They have first-hand experience with how the public history audience today is aware that there are multiple perspectives and experiences to be considered in trying to understand the past, and that this audience is open to a complex, multifaceted presentation of any story. These experiences have demonstrated to staff at Louisbourg that the presentation of history is evolving, thanks to the input of and exchanges with researchers, presenters, and audience. Although the changes observed have not been uniform, nonetheless the public response in the last ten years has been largely positive. Guides and presenters feel that there is an enthusiastic audience for complicated and at times uncomfortable stories, as a more sophisticated public recognizes that there must have been such stories; if these stories are not there, then the public is likely to question the honesty and authenticity of the overall presentation.

Conclusion

Rose and Dugas represent a different kind of exceptional woman than the 19th-century heroines of the colonial era such as Françoise Marie Jacquelin (Madame de la Tour), Laura Secord, or Madeleine de Verchères, who only temporarily transgressed their gender and social norms under exceptional circumstances to uphold existing structures.⁵⁹ The stories of Rose and Dugas speak to our contemporary demands for better gender and ethno-cultural history by demonstrating that oppressive class, racial, and gender norms were resisted and negotiated by the everyday people compelled to live with them. Their stories introduce visitors at Louisbourg to complex and uncomfortable aspects of our history. They are sympathetic heroines who help African Canadians and Acadians visiting the Fortress of Louisbourg to find their story within the grand narrative of a national historic site. They are, however, not typical. Marie Marguerite Rose was emancipated and ran a business, and Jeanne Dugas became a community leader whose story was listened to by the visiting bishop. They are “everyday” – but theirs

59 Colin M. Coates, “Commemorating the Woman Warrior of New France: Madeleine de Verchères, 1690s-1920s,” 29-46, and Cecilia Morgan, “Of Slender Frame and Delicate Appearance: The Placing of Laura Secord in the Narratives of Canadian Loyalist Tradition,” 47-66, in Neatby and Hodgins, *Settling and Unsettling Memories*.

are still fairly positive stories about the historical experiences they lived. As much as we admire these women, we must also question whether part of their appeal to public history programmers and presenters is that they complicate the narrative but not too much.

Having chosen to turn a spotlight on these women, we approach the life stories Rose and Dugas with humility and professional discipline as there is much we cannot know. Nonetheless, what we do know of their life stories is so compelling that we need to include them in the history of Atlantic Canada. People deeply moved by these stories have taken this history beyond the walls of Louisbourg, and out of the hands of official history. The emotions evoked by powerful theatrical performances and fictionalizations, as well as the reflection invited by discussions of the ambiguities that remain in their stories and of the significance of their individual actions in the historical context, will keep their stories and stories like theirs present and relevant in our shared history. Present and past interact continuously and, despite the many constraints placed on official public history, we can be encouraged by the degree to which what is seen as “commonsensical” has the capacity to evolve, however slowly.

ANNE MARIE LANE JONAH