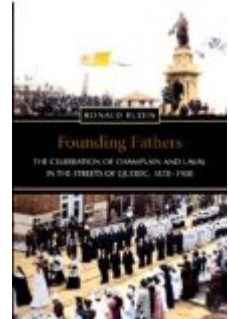


Ronald Rudin. *Founding Fathers: The Celebration of Champlain and Laval in the Streets of Quebec, 1878-1908.* Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 2003. xi + 290 pp. \$66.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8020-3645-2.



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Taking to the Streets

In an earlier book, *Making History in Twentieth-Century Quebec* (1997), Ronald Rudin argued that recent Quebec historiography, in its rush to characterize French Canada as typical of other modernizing western societies, had lost sight of the distinctive features of the Quebec past. In this book, which examines commemorative activities in Quebec City around the figures of Samuel de Champlain, the city's founder, and François de Laval, its first bishop, he seems to double back. After describing four grand occasions when civic and religious leaders, as well as ordinary citizens, took to the streets to honor their past—the reburial of Laval in 1878, the erection of monuments to Champlain and Laval in 1898 and 1908 respectively, and the 1908 tercentenary celebration of Champlain's arrival—he concludes that while the objects of veneration were local, the spectacles drew on "a repertoire of commemorative techniques in use on both sides of the Atlantic in order to reinforce the place of traditional elites in a rapidly urbanizing world" (p. 233).

As the preceding quotation suggests, Rudin seeks to understand why these elaborate events were staged, and how they were shaped by the ritual repertoires available at their specific moments. The re-interment of Laval was sparked by the accidental discovery of his remains in the basement of the Quebec Basilica by workmen doing repairs in the fall of 1877. The body was supposed to rest beneath the Seminary, but had been moved years before after a fire, and forgotten, as had Laval's impact on the shaping of Quebec. The rediscovery came at a fortuitous moment. Ultramontane and liberal factions within the Quebec clergy were bickering so vociferously that a papal envoy had been dispatched to keep the peace. Outside the Church, economic depression was generating class hostility. The reburial of Laval provided an opportunity for all elements in the Church and the community to pull together, and for the liberal Archbishop Tashereau to assert his leadership.

The result was a meticulously planned and, for Quebec City, unprecedented spectacle, intended to kick off the formal process of considering

Laval for canonization. The event began on May 2, 1878, when the bones were prepared for display, and reached its emotional crescendo three weeks later with a grand parade in front of 30,000 spectators which took the body from the Basilica, to the Ursuline Convent, Jesuit Church, St. Patrick's Church, the Hotel Dieu, and back to the Basilica. Modeled on the traditional F=te-Dieu circular procession, with the coffin in the symbolic center, the march made manifest the pecking order of the Catholic community, with the most important individuals and groups positioned closest to the casket. In the streets, Laval was proclaimed as a founding statesman; in the religious services inside the churches, he was praised as a devout Catholic.

The Soci=t= St-Jean-Baptiste de Qu=bec (SSJBQ) touted the idea of a Champlain monument in 1890, as a way of marking its fiftieth anniversary. Quickly realizing it could not finance the project within its own community, in part because the Catholic Church had little interest, the patriotic society turned for help to English Canadians, both inside and outside the province. The campaign went slowly, but by 1896, with contributions from various levels of government, including the province of Ontario, sufficient funds were in hand to proceed. A site near the Chateau Frontenac Hotel was chosen as much for its tourist appeal as its historical connection to the location of the city's original fort. The winning design, selected in a blind competition, depicted a secular Champlain with ties to old France. The inscriptions on the base further downplayed any explicit Catholic connection by sticking to a chronological list of his exploits rather than a description of his heroic, and Catholic, qualities. This Champlain clearly reflected the liberal and bi-cultural values of the monument's backers.

The formal dedication took place in September, 1898. The day was marked by two grand events, beginning with the annual St. Jean Baptiste Day parade, deferred from its normal staging

in June. The procession began in the working-class districts and proceeded to a Church in the upper town where a mass was held. Unlike the F=te-Dieu format of the Laval reburial, its route was linear, it separated marchers and spectators more sharply, and it placed participants in order of increasing status, with professional groups at the end. In the afternoon, a crowd of 35,000 or more assembled to unveil the monument. Although the governor-general, Lord Aberdeen, spoke exclusively in French, the crowd pleasers were a contingent of American sailors, fresh from the Spanish-American War, and the French consul-general who spoke of the religious mission that had brought his nation to the new world. Throughout the process of creating the monument, different versions of Champlain--secular statesman of New France, intrepid explorer of Canada, representative of metropolitan France, devout Catholic--had contended. In the end, most participants in the spectacle found a version with which they felt comfortable, including the Catholic hierarchy, which had largely ignored the project.

The monument to Laval was a different matter entirely for the Church. Once again, the SSJBQ proposed the idea, this time to mark the two hundredth anniversary of the bishop's death as well as the city's tercentenary. Clerical authorities were enthusiastic about the chance to affirm Catholic leadership of Quebec society, and to strengthen the push for Laval's sainthood without violating Vatican rules forbidding open campaigning. They were responsible for raising most of the necessary funds, putting a heavy finger on clergy and religious orders to contribute. Lay people were far less generous. Though the design competition was awarded without competition to Louis-Philippe H=bert, he was required to submit a number of models before satisfying the committee. The location of the monument was also controversial. The final product, depicting Laval in full bishop's regalia extending his arms to sum-

mon his flock, was erected on a cramped plot between the Archbishop's palace and the post office.

The unveiling was a much more elaborate affair than the two preceding spectacles. A three day program was devised, with the official dedication by governor-general, Lord Grey, sandwiched between the two most important processions of the French Canadian calendar--the F=te-Dieu celebration and the SSJBQ parade. While the Church clearly directed the proceedings, religious and secular groups each had an opportunity to take control of the streets.

The tercentenary festivities began a month later, drawing 150,000 mostly Protestant visitors to Quebec. Once again the idea had originated from within the SSJBQ, and once again the Society was shunted ultimately into a minor role, this time by Lord Grey who decided the three hundredth anniversary of the founding of Quebec City could be used to promote imperial sentiment in Canada and to foster entente between the French and English communities. He enlisted the participation of the Prince of Wales, who inevitably became the focal point of events. For tourists, the highlight of the twelve-day festival was a historical pageant tracing the evolution of Quebec from the appearance of Jacques Cartier to the War of 1812. For locals, the brouhaha engendered more ambivalence. Many well-off middle-class citizens garnered leading roles in the pageant, but working-class residents could less afford the price of admission, and were indifferent to British imperialist enthusiasms. They did succumb to the excitement of various street parades, notably the procession staged by the Association catholique de la jeunesse canadienne-fran=ais (ACJC) to the Champlain monument on opening day. Though the Church was profoundly disturbed by the need to give official recognition to Republican France, perceived to be stridently anti-Catholic, the bishops held their peace, bought off by Lord Grey's participation at the unveiling of the Laval monument. The most significant mo-

ment for them was a pontifical mass conducted on the Plains of Abraham. The Church, the SSJBQ, and many ordinary Quebecois were left with a feeling that their history had been appropriated and their participation marginalized. These suspicions may have contributed to the subsequent displacement of Laval and Champlain from the top of the French Canadian pantheon. By the 1920s, with a growing sense that "la nation" was threatened by homogenizing forces of modernity, the preeminent Quebec hero had become Dollard des Ormeaux, supposed defender of New France at the 1660 battle of the Long-Sault.

Almost inevitably when dealing with subjects of this sort, the book is full of descriptive detail about such things as routes of marches, civic decorations, the conduct of rituals, and content of speeches. What of its broader message? The latter two spectacles it covers were earlier discussed in H. V. Nelles's justly praised *The Art of Nation-Building: Pageantry and Spectacle at Quebec's Tercentenary* (1999). Does Rudin tell a different story? Not substantially. Divergences are matters of nuance and emphasis rather than contradiction. While Nelles sees the ACJC procession to the Champlain monument as the Tercentenary kick-off, for example, Rudin suggests it was more a conclusion to the events of the Laval unveiling. While Nelles details the theatrical re-enactment of Champlain's 1608 landing, Rudin talks about Quebecers' unhappiness that the actors were upstaged by the doings elsewhere of the Prince of Wales. Rudin has much less to say about the content of the historical pageants, but more to say about Catholic hostility to Republican France. Such discrepancies are not the stuff of grand historiographical debates. Perhaps there is more substantive disagreement about the response to the Tercentenary by the local francophone population. According to Nelles, many residents laughed at the pomposity of the goings-on around them, and then, having defused their significance, enjoyed the festivities. Rudin sees more passive resentment in the reaction, forshadowing senti-

ments that re-emerged during the First World War.

Rudin's first two events are not touched upon by Nelles. Does his longer view of commemorative activity reveal anything new about the history of Quebec? The descriptions of the forms of its most important processions--the F=te-Dieu and the SSJBQ parade--are useful in understanding how the imagined community of Quebec society was given concrete shape. The competing versions of Champlain and Laval help delineate the cleavages within Quebec society. The evidence of the ease with which the Church dominated the SSJBQ and of the Society's limited financial clout illuminate dynamics of power. These and other insights notwithstanding, there is little here to force a radical rethinking of Quebec history. This is not Rudin's most important book, but as usual, he tells an interesting story in an engaging way.

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