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Citizens of the Atlantic: Examining the Compagnie de Caen in Seventeenth Century New France

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Citizens of the Atlantic:
Examining the *Compagnie de Caën* in Seventeenth Century New France

by
Justin Paul Cerenzia

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee
of Lehigh University
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Citizens of the Atlantic: Examining the Compagnie de Caen in Seventeenth Century New France
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Figure 1—Toussaint Dubreuil, *Portrait of French King Henri IV as Hercules Slaying the Lernaean Hydra (Catholic League)*, c. 1600

Abstract

Scholarship on early New France has been rooted in Catholic folklore, largely shaped by heroic figures like Samuel de Champlain. While Champlain's contributions to New France must not be ignored there remained in New France, particularly in the early seventeenth century, a substantial role for Protestant merchant families, both within New France and within the larger Atlantic community. This study examines the *Compagnie de Caën* and its substantial role in the formative years of New France arguing that groups like the de Caën family should serve to redefine standard conceptions of identity in this period. Ultimately the story of the early modern Atlantic world is far less restrictive and rigid as conventional scholarship has led us to believe.

In the late spring of 1628 the Merchant Adventurers to Canada, a loosely aligned group of English privateers sailing under the auspices of King Charles I, embarked on a voyage to harass French interests in the turbulent waters of the North Atlantic. At the helm for this particular incursion were three brothers—Lewis, Thomas, and David Kirke—Protestants who were at one point in their lives seemingly subjects of the king of France.¹ Their target was to include the French settlements at Tadoussac, Cap Tourmente, and Quebec, now supported by Cardinal Richelieu’s Catholic-dominated, *Compagnie des Cent-Associés* and governed by Samuel de Champlain. The heavily outnumbered French settlers suffered immensely at the hands of the English invaders. Provisional ships bound for the Canadian coast, sent that same spring by Richelieu’s Hundred Associates, were captured at the mouth of the St. Lawrence. Farms were burned at Cap Tourmente. Houses were raided at Tadoussac. The Kirkes made off with 138 cannon and large quantities of furs in addition to burning some 12 ships and forcefully removing a number of French colonists. While they would ultimately fail to capture the French stronghold of Quebec in 1628, they would return once more in 1629.² This time Champlain could do little. A series of terse correspondences between Champlain and David Kirke revealed the inescapable plight of Champlain and his countrymen. Champlain delivered the following note to Kirke, signaling his demise:

Gentlemen, The truth is that negligence, or the hindrances cause by the bad weather, or the perils of the sea have prevented the arrival of the relief that we were expecting in our suffering, and have put it out of our power to resist the carrying out of your design, as we did last year, without giving you an opportunity of making good your claims, which, if it please you, will only be realized now on condition of your carrying into effect the offers you made us of a composition, the terms of which we shall communicate to you very shortly, after we have decided on them; awaiting which, you will be good enough not to allow your vessels to come within cannon shot, nor attempt to set foot on land until everything shall have been settled between us, which will be for tomorrow. Meantime I shall remain, Gentlemen, your affectionate servant, Champlain.³

¹ Andrew D. Nicholls, *A Fleeting Empire: Early Stuart Britain and the Merchant Adventurers to Canada*, (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010), 79.

² David Hackett Fischer, *Champlain’s Dream*, (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2008), 414-417.

³ Samuel de Champlain, *The Works of Samuel de Champlain, Vol. 6*, ed. H.P. Biggar, trans. W.D. LeSuer (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1922-1936), 54-55. Published in six volumes. (Hereafter cited as Champlain, *Works*)

On July, 19, 1629 Samuel de Champlain, the celebrated father of New France, ceded control of Quebec and its surrounding territories to the Kirkes and the Company of Merchant Adventurers to Canada. Days later an English flag would be hoisted on one of the fort's citadels in conjunction with a series of military salvos, thus signaling the apparent end of French colonizing efforts in Canada.⁴

At the surface the events of 1628 to 1629 merely reflected a clash of imperial rivals on the periphery of empire. French, English, Dutch, and Basque groups routinely sparred over access to the abundant fisheries of the Atlantic waters and wrangled over control of the lucrative fur trade. Yet what transpired in and around the waters of the North Atlantic during the early stages of the seventeenth century was far more complex than mere imperial jousting. Richelieu's *Compagnie des Cent Associes* had proven to be an unmitigated failure. Founded in 1627, the *Compagnie des Cent Associes* represented an important change in French policy towards the colonial administration of Canada in that only Catholics were granted permission to invest in the company. In the decades preceding the 1629 capture of Quebec a number of diverse French trading companies and monopolies, often led by Huguenots, engaged in the lucrative, albeit tenuous, economy of the North Atlantic and led efforts to permanently settle New France. At the forefront of these efforts from 1620 to 1627 was the *Compagnie de Caën*. Led by two men, the Protestant Guillaume de Caën and his Catholic nephew Emery and made up of both Protestant and Catholic subordinates, the *Compagnie de Caën* would prove instrumental in the foundational period of New France. The presence, indeed centrality of the *Compagnie de Caën* offers a

http://link.library.utoronto.ca/champlain/browse_results.cfm?lang=eng&browsetype=Subject&query=Champlain,%20Samuel%20de,%201567-1635. (Accessed: 10/13/2010).

⁴ Champlain, *Works*, 6: 57-65.

compelling case study for matters of religious tolerance, economic opportunity, and colonial administrations in the seventeenth century French Atlantic.

The *Compagnie de Caën* was, without question, the strongest and most influential of the early French Canadian trading companies. Whereas prior companies routinely neglected to meet established settlement quotas and failed to make important capital investments to the colonial infrastructure, French possessions in Canada experienced a period of unrivaled support under the sponsorship of Guillaume and Emery de Caën. The de Caëns would hold their monopoly for nearly a decade, a decade which witnessed some of the worst hostilities towards Protestants in France since the civil wars of the sixteenth century and, according to historian A.D. Lublinskaya, a decade which ushered in the advent of capitalism in France and the dawn of French Absolutism.⁵ Additionally, even upon the eventual loss of their fur-trading monopoly, the company would play the principal role in recapturing Quebec from English hands. Most importantly the religious configuration of the *Compagnie de Caën* offered a viable, and ultimately peaceful, alternative to increasingly restrictive policies formulated at the hands of Louis XIII and Cardinal Richelieu.

The story of the foundational period of New France and of France's role in the North Atlantic is one that eludes simple explanation, yet simple explanations have dominated scholarship on the topic. Historians have tended to emphasize divisions and tensions created by the religious turbulence of the early seventeenth century. But these divisions, no doubt important, do not tell the complete story of the seventeenth century Atlantic world, particularly from a French perspective. While imperial rivalry played an influential role, one cannot fully appreciate the complexities of the French Atlantic without also considering the multitude of ways France's

⁵ A.D. Lublinskaya, *French Absolutism: The Crucial Phase, 1620-1629*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 145.

internal religious struggles shaped its laws, economics, and culture in the early seventeenth century. Considerations must also be given to the domestic politics of continental Europe in order to fully appreciate sometimes incongruent imperial policies or lax enforcement on the periphery. Furthermore, traditional assessments of Protestant-Catholic religious conflict, both in France and from a broader European context, are inadequate.

Ultimately, the Atlantic Ocean blurred traditional conceptions of national allegiance and allowed individuals to re-imagine possibilities of colonial identity. The oft-overlooked existence of the *Compagnie de Caën* coupled with their rivalry with the Merchant Adventurers to Canada demonstrated the fundamental transformation of European religious identity and challenged standard definitions of allegiance in the burgeoning nation-state system. There lay within the early modern world a “cosmopolitan diaspora, a Protestant international,” according to historian J.F. Boshier.⁶ Thrust into the Atlantic as a result of the religious conflicts that ravaged the European continent over the course of two centuries this group was composed of people hailing from a myriad of European polities, yet oftentimes not wholly affiliated with their homeland. Perhaps unsurprisingly, merchants dominated much of this Protestant international. Boshier writes, “They freighted ships with goods for sale abroad, sent sons and nephews across the seas as agents in order to extend their trading circles, and corresponded with foreign trading partners. Such business practices gave them international contacts stronger than those of the soldiers and artisans of the Huguenot dispersion and different from those of the intellectuals.”⁷ Although Boshier emphasizes the linkages created within this group, there were also stark divisions shaped by conflict and rivalry. In some instances, families that had once resided and worshipped in the same coastal cities of France now waged interpersonal and imperial rivalry on the high seas.

⁶ J.F. Boshier, “Huguenot Merchants and the Protestant International,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, Vol. LII, No. 1 (January 1995): 77.

⁷ *Ibid*, 77.

The French de Caëns and the English Kirkes were two such families. The de Caëns, natives of the French coastal city of Dieppe, were a prominent merchant family during the latter stages of the sixteenth century well into the middle seventeenth century. Led by family architect Guillaume, they would hold a fur trade monopoly in New France, engage in the wine trade across the English Channel, and lease ships to those headed to the New World.⁸ What set the de Caëns apart from other, French merchant families, however, was the presence and importance of a Catholic relative, Emery. Emery appears to have sailed to the East Indies, at some point in his life, in addition to his service in the Atlantic.⁹ The Kirkes were in many ways very similar to the de Caëns, with the exception of one key area—their allegiance to England. Gervase Kirke (sometimes spelled Gervais or Jarvis) was born in England in 1568. Although he began as a landholder, at some point in his life he adopted the guild-regulated profession of the merchant trade, eventually marrying and setting up his own business in the port city of Dieppe—the same city of de Caën origin.¹⁰ Gervase would go on to have seven children—five sons and two daughters.¹¹ These sons would soon meet the de Caëns on the periphery of the French and English empires, and in doing so fundamentally alter standard conceptions of religious identity and national allegiance.

The Atlantic Ocean was more than a mere void between two continents. It was an entity that allowed for French Protestants to imagine themselves as part of a separate community—not wholly French, yet not bound by their religion. For some this meant switching sides. For others, there were opportunities to be both French and Protestant. For others still, there appeared a third category, previously unrealized and uniquely tied to the Atlantic. In a world of inescapable

⁸ Marcel Trudel. "De Caën, Guillaume." In George Williams Brown, ed. *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, http://biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?id_nbr=110. (Accessed 11/30/2012).

⁹ Trudel, "De Caën, Emery." DCB, http://biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?id_nbr=111. (Accessed 11/30/2012).

¹⁰ Nicholls, 78-79.

¹¹ Trudel, "Kirke, Gervase." DCB, http://biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?id_nbr=368. (Accessed 11/30/2012).

religious pluralism, the Atlantic encouraged a more amorphous understanding of one's identity.¹² Scholars have long sought to illuminate the divisions between imperial and religious rivals, but have inexplicably ignored numerous examples of cooperation and cosmopolitanism in New France. Following the 1598 Edict of Nantes there began an increased level of religious tolerance both in France and in the colonies abroad. This would remain the norm until the death of Henri IV and the rise of Louis XIII and Cardinal Richelieu, when a more restrictive solution for the Protestant issue became desirable to the French monarchy.¹³ Nonetheless, Protestants would still play a role in French colonization of the new world throughout the seventeenth century. Not until the 1685 revocation of the Edict of Nantes and the adoption of the *Code Noir* would Protestants be forcefully removed from the French colonial narrative. Utilizing primarily the years between the initial signing of the Edict of Nantes (1598) and the return of Canada to French hands with the Treaty of St. Germain-en-Laye (1632) this study will seek to explicate the role of the *Compagnie de Caën* in the formative years of New France, and in doing so, illustrate the window of opportunity that existed for a more secular and cosmopolitan understanding of the early Atlantic world. As much of Europe descended into the chaos of the Thirty Years War and as the world at large suffered through a larger, general crisis, the *Compagnie de Caën* was in the midst of a pluralistic experiment built on tolerance and economic vibrancy which historians have inexplicably disregarded.¹⁴

There is an inherent difficulty in studying early French Canada from the Protestant perspective. Historical works on New France have focused on a number of disparate parts. The fur trade, the seigneurial system, and the economic structure of the colony comprise much of the

¹² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (London: Verso, 1983), 7.

¹³ Fischer, 379.

¹⁴ Geoffrey Parker and Leslie Smith, eds., *The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century*, (New York: Routledge, 1997). E.J. Hobsbawm, "The General Crisis of the European Economy in the 17th Century," *Past & Present*, No. 5 (May, 1954): 33-53.

scholarship.¹⁵ Many of these focus on a later period, well after the foundational era of New France however. Much of the scholarship that does take into account the earliest stages of the seventeenth century, has centered on Samuel de Champlain and his celebrated role as the father of New France. David Hackett Fischer's recent work, *Champlain's Dream* examines the seminal role played by Champlain in the construction of New France, tracing his involvement in the colony throughout the course of his life. Although the work presents a comprehensive view of Samuel de Champlain's role in the French Atlantic, it understates the complexity of New France within the larger Atlantic World during the seventeenth century, portraying Champlain as a kind of omnipotent hero in the development of the colony. In doing so, it neglects the important contributions of the *Compagnie de Caën* and of Protestants to the eventual progression of New France. Although a veritable tome of exhaustive inquiry, Fischer's study falls prey to traditional storylines of Catholic triumph in the face of Protestant antagonism and in doing so, depicts too narrow a view of the French experiment in the North Atlantic.

Compounding our inability to understand the complexities of early French Canada is a historiographical approach shaped by uniquely Canadian and uniquely French perspectives. The Atlantic helps manifest an entirely different conception of identity, yet both Canadian and French historians tend to ignore, or fail to realize, this condition. Articulating the need for a broader, more Atlantic approach, Laurent Dubois writes:

Traditionally, much of the scholarship on the French Atlantic has focused on a regional approach rather than an Atlantic one. Indeed, the approach of Atlantic history still has comparatively little traction within the French academic institutions. Though there are centers devoted to the study of 'la France Atlantique,' their focus is on the towns and regions of the Atlantic coast of metropolitan France. In part because the French Empire in North America ended before the French

¹⁵For a more thorough analysis of these topics and more, see: Richard Colebrook Harris, *The Seigneurial System in Early Canada: A Geographical Study*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1966), Louise Dechene's *Habitants and Merchants in Seventeenth Century Montreal*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), Eric Jay Dolin's, *Fur, Fortune, and Empire: The Epic History of the Fur Trade in America*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2010) and Allan Greer's *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant: Rural Society in Three Quebec Parishes, 1740-1840*, (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1985).

Revolution, still seen as the ‘foundational’ event in terms of the history and identity of the French nation, the experiences in Canada and Louisiana have remained on the edges of public memory and historical writing in France. In Quebec, where a great deal of excellent historical work has been produced about French Canada, this history has been focused primarily on exploring the distinct regional history of this area within North America.¹⁶

Historian Allan Greer’s essay addressing the fractured nature of New France’s historiography offers further potential methods of study.¹⁷ Greer’s primary goal is to first define the parameters and geographic boundaries of “New France” and secondly, to “escape the constraints of parochialisms of all sorts, including national parochialisms, that have structured and channeled our inquiries, privileging some aspects of the past while obscuring others.”¹⁸ Like Dubois, Greer sees distinct merits in the Atlantic approach, writing:

Notwithstanding the fact that France was a leading—arguably the leading—seafaring power through what North Americanists call the colonial period, New France tends to be overlooked in the Atlantic history field. If blame were assigned for this state of affairs, one would have to mention the reluctance of historians of the French-speaking world to embrace the Atlantic approaches along with the entrenched Anglo-American bias in Atlantic history. Until recently, New France specialists interested in an Atlantic approach received little aid or encouragement from scholars of *ancient regime* France, fixated as the latter have tended to be on France itself and displaying much less interest than their English counterparts in the kingdom’s overseas extensions.¹⁹

This paper falls firmly in the realm described by Dubois and Greer. By adopting a hypernational, Atlantic approach we can move beyond the typical constraints of nationalism, thus allowing us to more properly assess the complexities of colonial identity and allegiance in the foundational era of French Canada. Furthermore, although the examination of the *Compagnie de Caën* represents a micro approach, it nonetheless expresses values and ideas at the macro level, thus avoiding the trap of “anachronistic national narratives” as described by Greer.²⁰

¹⁶ Laurent Dubois, “The French Atlantic.” In *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal*, Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan, eds., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 145.

¹⁷ Allan Greer, “National, Transnational, and Hypernational Historiographies: New France Meets Early American History,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 91, (Dec 2010), 695-717. See also Cecile Vidal, “The Reluctance of French Historians to Address Atlantic History,” *Southern Quarterly* 43, No. 4 (2006): 153-189.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 716.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 718.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 716.

Further difficulty for the nature of this type of study lay within the dominance of Catholic source material for the colony. Two missionary groups, the Recollects and Jesuits, were active in early French Canada and the Jesuits in particular took scrupulous, detailed notes of their experiences in the country.²¹ Unsurprisingly, these accounts make little reference to Protestant influence within the colony, and typically reference only negative relations with the competing religion. The writings of Samuel de Champlain offer another source of information. In spite of his Catholic faith, Champlain is perhaps a more neutral source as he often fostered an environment of toleration, as instructed by Henri IV.²² Beginning in 1922 and led by Canadian historian H.P. Biggar, a six-volume set of Champlain's writings was compiled and translated into English. This work, along with other supporting documents is available online through The Champlain Society, a digital history collection supported by the University of Toronto. Additional evidence, also in digital format, has been collected from varying sources based in France and Canada. These sources—a hodgepodge of correspondence between French governmental figures, international treaties, and appeals for financial restitution following the repeal of the de Caën monopoly—will serve to fill in the gaps present in the accounts of the Jesuits and Champlain. Even with increased efforts at digitization however, one must read these sources with a keen eye. Although the Edict of Nantes granted religious toleration to Protestants, it did not guarantee equal representation within the historical record.

²¹*The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents, 1610-1791*, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaite. Available: <http://puffin.creighton.edu/jesuit/relations/> (Accessed October 12, 2010). In spite of their presence and activity in New France during this period, little reference is made to de Caën influence in the region, and when it does, it typically refers only to Emery, the Catholic nephew of Guillaume. Nonetheless the work proves valuable as we can corroborate claims made in Champlain's diary during the English incursion into Quebec with that information available in the *Jesuit Relations*.

²² Fischer, 379-380.

The Edict of Nantes & Protestant Legal Identity

We cannot hope to understand the existence of the *Compagnie de Caën* in the seventeenth century French Atlantic, without first examining the complex history of the French wars of religion, beginning in 1562. In no way is this meant to be a complete account—yet there were clear legal and cultural implications of these conflicts, which would inextricably influence the foundational period of New France. Catherine de Medici’s Edict of January (1562), which granted legal toleration to Protestantism, would plunge the country into a cycle of deadly civil wars for the next three decades.²³ While Medici’s attempt at legislating religious coexistence would be the catalyst for conflict, there was nonetheless contention between the two sides prior. In a 1561 letter to Pope Pius IV, Jean de Montluc, bishop of Valence demonstrated his fear of the Protestant influence on the French kingdom, writing:

“...a quarter of his kingdom has left the communion of the church, which quarter is made up of gentlemen, men of letters, the chief bourgeois of the cities and the lesser people, all of whom know the world and are trained in arms. Thus these separated people have no lack of military resources, including in their number a great many gentlemen and some old soldiers experience in war. They have no lack of good counsel, having with them more than three quarters of the men of letters; they lack no money to support their affairs, for they have among them a good portion of the great cities and powerful families, both of the nobility and of the third estate. Furthermore there is such unity among them and such resolve to support each other, that there is no hope of dividing them and still less of bringing them back by force without putting this kingdom in danger of becoming prey to foreign conquest, or so weakening it that it would not return to its former state for fifty years.”²⁴

Montluc may have overstated the relative strength of his Protestant rivals, but his sentiment nonetheless predicted some of the central problems of the next three decades. As Phillip Benedict has written, we may understand the wars of religion as France’s “gradual, painful working out of an equilibrium between the two religious parties and of a set of legal terms governing their coexistence that allowed religious plurality to function in a land whose deepest traditions rejected it, but where two faiths had become too deeply rooted to be eliminated,” yet at

²³ Mack P. Holt, ed., *Renaissance and Reformation France*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 147.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 4.

the same time, fundamentally altered the nature of subject-ruler allegiance, thus also transforming the nature of the French monarchy.²⁵ While both of these realms were important, it is the “set of legal terms” that proved most significant, particularly from a Huguenot perspective. There would be no clearer set of legal terms than the 1598 Edict of Nantes.

Although the Edict of January proved unsuccessful in promoting peaceful coexistence, the 1598 Edict of Nantes would achieve what none of the previous peace settlements had managed—a lasting and meaningful peace. “For all of its weaknesses, exceptions, and contingencies,” writes Mack Holt, “the Edict of Nantes did result in Protestants and Catholics agreeing to lay down their arms.”²⁶ Furthermore, the Edict established the legitimacy of Protestant involvement in political and economic affairs—a development which would encourage Protestant participation in the colonial effort. This framework, albeit tenuous, would serve as a blueprint for much of the seventeenth century. Diane Margolf writes, “Whether one is tracing the Huguenots’ survival in France or their assimilation overseas, law clearly plays an important role in the story. We have perhaps come to take for granted how much law has shaped the trajectory of the Huguenots’ history.”²⁷ The newly established law of French religious coexistence would be continually tied to Huguenot fortunes both at home and abroad. However as Margolf suggests, we cannot understand the Edict solely on the terms first established in 1598. A strict interpretation of the document helped to undermine the Huguenot position throughout much of the seventeenth century.²⁸ Thus, the ebb and flow of the domestic politics of France, in

²⁵ Ibid, 147.

²⁶ Mack P. Holt, *The French Wars of Religion, 1562-1629*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 177.

²⁷ Diane Margolf, “Identity, Law, and the Huguenots of Early Modern France.” In Bertrand Van Ruymbeke and Randy J. Sparks, eds., *Memory and Identity: The Huguenots in France and the Atlantic Diaspora*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 27.

²⁸ Ibid, 27.

conjunction with the rise and fall of individual kings and their advisors, would greatly influence the fortunes and misfortunes of French Protestants during this period.

Henry IV's diplomacy in obtaining French approval of the Edict of Nantes cannot be overstated. Cynics propose that Henry's decision to abjure his Calvinist faith was merely a ploy to help capture the crown. As Holt suggests however, though Henry was unquestionably motivated by politics and a desire to end the civil wars, it would be unfair to intimate that Henry's conversion was either insincere or cynically made. He continues, writing:

What (also) may not have been evident to contemporaries at the moment of his abjuration was that Henry IV did indeed have a plan to restore order and bring an end to the fighting: by reuniting all French men and women under one religion, the Catholic faith of all French kings since Cloves. The goal of 'one king, one faith, one law' was as important to Henry IV as it was his predecessors.²⁹

If 'one king, one faith, one law' was to be the rallying cry of Henry IV, then there would need to be at least some concessions to garner Huguenot support. Henry IV's task was a difficult one—he needed to appease Catholic moderates who had rallied to his cause, yet at the same time he needed to protect his former co-religionnaires. Henry IV's approach trended towards secularism and established a precedent that would eventually enable the likes of the de Caëns to take part in the Atlantic experiment. Holt disagrees with this sentiment, arguing that a view that stresses the importance of secular politics is both anachronistic and misses the point of Henry's ultimate goal of religious unity.³⁰ But the situation created in 1598 was undeniably vastly different from any other point in French history. For the first time, there was explicit acceptance of the presence of a sizable portion of the French citizenry not in communion with the Catholic Church. At odds with previous domestic policy and now at odds with the church, the Edict of Nantes resembled

²⁹ Holt, 156.

³⁰ Ibid, 166.

nothing less than a tacit acceptance of the encroaching nature of secularism as a result of Protestant gains made throughout the French wars of religion.

The Edict consisted of four, distinct documents broken down into some 92 general articles, 56 secret articles dealing with individual towns and two royal *brevets*. These *brevets*, which dealt with financial compensation for Protestant church officials and military protection in Protestant held cities, need not be registered by the French *parlements*, could be summarily withdrawn at the whim of a king, and could later be overturned by a subsequent ruler.³¹ More generally, the Edict addressed the terms by which Huguenots would coexist with their French brethren, and this portion was ratified by the *parlements* thus demonstrating a far-reaching commitment to the terms set forth under the Edict.³² To further this commitment, over one-third of the Edict's articles dealt with the fair administration of justice and equal access to the court system for Protestants. Margolf writes:

During the Wars of Religion, Huguenots complained that the *parlements*—the highest royal law courts in the French judicial hierarchy—were composed of predominantly Catholic magistrates and were therefore inherently hostile to Huguenot litigants. Huguenots demanded special tribunals (or at least the inclusion of Huguenot judges in royal law courts) in order to assure a fair hearing of their legal disputes, along with the share of political power and social status which accompanied judicial office. Such arrangements had a complex and troubled history during the later sixteenth century; in 1598, the *Edict of Nantes* provided a new legal foundation for the Huguenots access to royal justice.³³

Although the primary outcome of the Edict of Nantes was peace, the inclusion of a reformed legal system meant to directly address Protestant grievances would prove equally significant. If Protestants possessed an avenue for legal redress, then they might be more apt to participate in the colonial endeavor. A country at peace could participate fully in the colonial endeavor, using

³¹ Holt, ed., 166-172. Holt's assertion that because secularism did not exist in the time of Henry IV, it could not have served as a motivating force for the Edict of Nantes is a faulty one. Henry placed a number of Protestants within his court and held the desire for peace, even at the cost of religious unification, as the motivating force of his reign. Furthermore, to suggest that Henry supported both Gallicanism and the supremacy of the Roman Catholic Church seems contradictory.

³² Margolf, 29.

³³ *Ibid*, 30-21. (Emphasis mine)

resources to counter European rivals and not its own populace. Although likely an unintended but nonetheless fortunate consequence of the Edict, many within the Protestant community possessed significant sea-faring experience, which would only help the larger causes of the French state. Indeed, Guillaume de Caën's company would make use of the French legal system—at times successfully—to address grievances pertaining to their own colonial endeavors.

At first glance, Toussaint Dubreuil's 1600 portrait of Henri IV depicted as Hercules slaying the *Lernaean Hydra*³⁴ seems to suggest definitive Protestant victory over the vaunted Catholic league. In actuality however, Dubreuil's choice of imagery deftly reflected the changing nature of religion and politics following the carefully negotiated agreement. This was not a depiction of Protestant forces triumphing over Catholic. Instead it reaffirmed the supremacy of the French monarchy, and demonstrated what was now possible as religious coexistence became the norm. Now that some one million Protestants had been legally recognized as French subjects, less overt symbols of Catholic and Gallican power would be needed to represent the crown. Thus we see Dubreuil's choice of the classically heroic Hercules, which replaced the explicit religious representations of Henry III. This subtle, yet important distinction between a classical royal image and an overtly Christian one nonetheless maintained the idea that kings were in some ways still divine.³⁵

The peace established by the 1598 Edict of Nantes gave rise to ample economic opportunities for Protestant sea-faring merchants, of which Guillaume de Caën was an integral part. It thrust the French into the turbulent waters of the North Atlantic, ready to meet imperial foes on distant shores instead of one another in their own homeland. But in many ways, the

³⁴ See Figure 1

³⁵ Holt, ed., 227-228.

fundamental changes to the legal system merely reinforced France's commitment to religious pluralism, while also reinvigorating French, co-religious economic enterprises within the Atlantic community. As early as 1555 both Catholic and Protestant merchants had engaged in efforts to facilitate French economic interests along the coast of Brazil. Seeking to dispel the myth that Brazil's Fort Coligny was meant as a Protestant refuge, historian John McGrath argues instead, "it is clear that this colonizing effort in Brazil was the manifestation of a very serious attempt by the French crown to claim and establish effective occupation of a vast and potentially lucrative part of the New World."³⁶ Traditional historical interpretations of the endeavor at Fort Coligny suggest that this was nothing more than an attempt by Protestants to establish a religious haven in the midst of civil war at home. In actuality, McGrath effectively demonstrates that this too was a joint effort on behalf of Protestants and Catholics, in service to the crown. Although the venture would ultimately fail, McGrath's study suggests at least a tacit legacy of cooperation amongst religious rivals within the Atlantic frontier. That Dubreuil chose to depict Henry IV as a classical Hercules figure, vanquishing the multi-headed hydra of the Catholic League, spoke volumes about the future of France and its nascent experiment with modern, secular politics. This was a sovereign who recognized the potential of the merchant class—while he may have been influenced by the *politique* element within French society he was equally influenced by loyal Protestants.³⁷ Henry IV's ability to juggle the seemingly disparate parts of sixteenth century French society confirmed his commitment to reason of state, paving the way for the Edict of Nantes and the eventual rise of the *Compagnie de Caën*.

³⁶ John McGrath, "Polemic & History in French Brazil, 1555-1560," *Sixteenth Century Journal*, XXVII/2 (1996): 387.

³⁷ Holt argues that the so-called 'politique' party was in fact myth. "There was never any organized party of 'politiques,'" he writes. While he is most likely correct in his assertion that 'politiques' lacked distinct political organization, their presence nonetheless suggests an important shift of political consciousness within French society. See Holt, 170-173.

The Compagnie de Caën

The Atlantic seemingly encouraged an explicitly secularist model of colonization from a French perspective in the early stages of the seventeenth century. Particularly amongst the Atlantic merchant community there appeared a movement committed to curtailing religious extremism. According to Liewain Van Doren, as early as 1570 there was a “movement that cut across religious divisions and was characterized by a conscious subordination of religious differences (where) Catholics and Protestants alike joined a common secular cause.”³⁸ McGrath has shown, Protestant and Catholic efforts at colonization began in earnest in the South Atlantic as early as 1555. In the North Atlantic, French Protestants would enjoy at least partial control of the lucrative fur trade in Canada in 1588, and in doing so take on markedly increased responsibilities in the colonial administration and maintenance of New France. From 1588 until 1620 no fewer than eight different trading companies held exclusive rights of trade in New France.³⁹ The religious makeup of these companies reflected the shift towards efforts at religious toleration as advocated by King Henry IV. The structure of these earliest companies, privately funded yet regulated by the crown and often required to subsidize colonization, was erratic at best.⁴⁰ Described by historian Peter Moogk as “French colonialism on the cheap” the system would ultimately prove difficult to sustain.⁴¹ The alleged tightfistedness of the French monarchy in colonizing efforts in the North Atlantic should not detract from the substantial contributions of these companies during New France’s foundational period.

³⁸ Liewain Van Doren, “Revolt and Reaction in the City of Romans, Dauphine, 1579-1580.” *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 5 (1974): 86-99.

³⁹ It is important to note that in every one of these instances after 1603, Samuel de Champlain, the face of French endeavors in Canada, worked in the service of those who held the monopoly. Champlain may have been a constant within French Canada, but he remained beholden to those who paid his salary and the laws that governed France (primarily the Edict of Nantes).

⁴⁰ Fischer, 604-608.

⁴¹ Peter Moogk, *La Nouvelle France: The Making of French Canada—A Cultural History*, (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2000), 13.

The most important of these companies, the *Compagnie de Caën*, was founded in 1620, at the behest of French Viceroy Montmorency.⁴² The last of the pseudo-private trading companies and the last with official Protestant leadership, its organizational composition revealed the possibilities of a cosmopolitan New France. Scant documentary evidence makes it difficult to ascertain the exact structure of the *Compagnie de Caën*, yet we do know that the company was born in a competitive environment, where a variety of minor nobles and merchants sought special privileges from the crown to gain an advantage in the New World. Traditionally, these companies adopted a structure that had arisen in the Middle Ages. Risk was spread amongst company investors, and amongst a wide array of ships.⁴³ We can be confident that the company and the de Caën family itself was divided between Catholic and Protestant interests. Guillaume, the Protestant leader, and Emery, his Catholic nephew, held the monopoly for nearly seven years until the emergence of Richelieu's *Compagnie des Cent-Associés*. In addition, the subordinates within the *Compagnie de Caën* were also of mixed faith.⁴⁴ Documentary evidence will demonstrate that Guillaume was the primary architect of the *Compagnie de Caën*, whereas Emery served in a support role, often piloting ships on his uncle's behalf to the new world. Much of this study's analysis will focus on Guillaume's role as the company's architect, paying close attention to the way in which his Protestantism affected the status of the company both in the New World and in France.

⁴² Accomodement de la Compagnie de la Nouvelle-France avec le nommé de Caen à qui ce commerce avait été oté, Novembre 20, 1620, in Library and Archives of Canada: Digital Collection, trans. Malcolm Surer http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3143090&rec_nbr_list=3108839,3109073,3109071,3143090,3143089,3143085,3110198,2396985,2396981,304494 (Accessed October 1, 2010)

⁴³ Gayle Brunelle, *The New World Merchants of Rouen, 1559-1630*, (Kirskville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1991), 36-39.

⁴⁴ Fischer, 379.

The timing of the rise of the *Compagnie de Caën* and its stability over a seven year period would also prove revealing. Formed some ten years after Henry IV's death and in the midst of significant Protestant rebellion in France, the choice to appoint a trading company of such evident diversity suggests that the legacy of the Edict of Nantes and a commitment to secular politics was firmly in place.⁴⁵ A 1620 letter from Henri Montmorency, then Viceroy of New France, informed Champlain of the revocation of the *Compagnie de Rouen et Saint-Malo's* charter. Montmorency writes:

Mr. Champlain-

For several reason I have thought it right to exclude the shareholders from Rouen and St. Malo in the trade to New France from returning to that country. And, to render you assistance and provide you with what is necessary, I have chosen the Sieurs de Caën, uncle and nephew, and their associates; the first is a good merchant and the second a good sea-captain, so that he will be able to help you effectually and cause the authority of the King to be recognized in those distant regions under my government. I recommend you to assist him and those who shall go out with his authority, against all others, in order to maintain them in the enjoyment of the privileges which I have granted to them.⁴⁶

Those “several reasons” seem to allude to two distinct matters. First, increased Protestant insurrection from precisely those territories at home forced Montmorency's decision to reconsider the allegiances of the shareholders from Rouen and St. Malo. Additionally, and perhaps more pressing to the matter of colonization, the *Compagnie de Rouen et Saint-Malo* failed tremendously in meeting even the most minimal goals for support.⁴⁷ Moreover, Montmorency's letter is revealing for what it does not say. In the letter he neglects to mention Guillaume de Caën's religious background as a Protestant, rather choosing to describe him as a “good merchant.” Similarly, his description of Emery as a “good sea-captain” demonstrates the necessity of skilled men in the treacherous currents of the North Atlantic. Montmorency's focus on the talents and abilities of the de Caëns as opposed to their religious preference thus

⁴⁵ Holt, 180-182.

⁴⁶ *Works*, 5: 14

⁴⁷ Fischer, 606. Ironically, some historians have referred to this particular company as “Champlain's Company” because of the central role he played in its administration. If he was a central figure in this particular company, and not just a placeholder, then it further undermines the mythic status ascribed to him.

demonstrates the importance of knowledge over religion. Pragmatism and a willingness to appoint the best man for the job on behalf of the better interests of the French Canadian colonies undoubtedly played some role in Montmorency's decision. But in a time of increasing tensions between Catholics and Protestants at home, there remained a devotion to the tenets of toleration as espoused in the Edict of Nantes, at least within the realm of the Atlantic. Protestants would continue to be marginalized in the sphere of domestic politics, but would maintain primacy as an economic force in the French Atlantic world.

The 1620 appointment of the de Caëns also coincided with an important restructuring of colonial administration within the government of France. The key creation during this period was that of the Office of Intendant for New France, which David Hackett Fischer describes as an “instrument of royal absolutism.”⁴⁸ Prior to this development, both Champlain and the trading company in power were left with little supervision within New France. Montmorency's creation of Office of the Intendant for New France allowed for greater royal oversight within the colony—it also afforded the newly formed *Compagnie de Caën* a previously unrealized level of legitimacy within New France. This reorganization rendered the *Compagnie de Rouen et Saint-Malo* obsolete. The incident, although ultimately empowering to Champlain, did not grant him absolute authority in New France as Fischer suggests.⁴⁹

Champlain's authority and the limits of religious tolerance would soon be tested—a consistent theme throughout the early stages of New France. Although Montmorency may have been unconcerned with the religion of Guillaume de Caen, Champlain was not. Responding in

⁴⁸ Fischer, 368. Jean-Jacques Dolu was named the Intendant of New France in 1620. Evidence suggests he and Champlain were, at the very least acquaintances with one another.

⁴⁹ Fischer puts the emphasis of colonial administration squarely upon Champlain during this period. In actuality, Champlain's control over the colony was tenuous at best, in spite of Villemon and Montmorency's intentions. Although he possessed a markedly higher level of authority in comparison to the *Compagnie de Rouen et Saint-Malo*, this authority would wane under the *Compagnie de Caën* and would eventually cease to exist entirely following the English invasion of New France in 1628.

his diary to Montmorency's letter appointing Guillaume de Caën head of the newly formed trading company, he wrote, "As to the Sieur de Caën (Guillaume), although he was of the opposite religion (Huguenot), there were great hopes of his becoming a Catholic."⁵⁰ Striking a similar tone, Recollect priest Gabriel Sagard, member of the first *Compagnie de Caën* expedition to New France called Guillaume de Caën a "liberal and understanding man," and like Champlain hoped he might one day convert to Catholicism.⁵¹ Both Champlain and Sagard echo the 'one faith' sentiment that characterized many Catholics understanding of the intended goal of the Edict of Nantes. Although toleration remained the official policy, most Catholics in French society firmly believed in the necessity of a nation rooted in religious unity, whereas Protestants emphasized the 'perpetual and irrevocable' nature of tolerance, as expressed in the Edict's preamble. Once more, the level of tolerance granted by way of the Edict of Nantes depended largely on who was in charge and at what point in the seventeenth century they were interpreting the Edict. Prior to Guillaume de Caën's arrival Champlain was given explicit instructions regarding his, and others', religious practices, and limitations on just how open New France would become. He wrote, "And as to the exercise of his religion, I was to tell him that he was not to practise (sic) it either on land or on sea; and as to anything further I was to use my own judgment."⁵² The order, a direct command from the recently named *Intendant*, Jean-Jacques Dolu, demonstrated that although Protestantism would be tolerated in the colonies, overt demonstrations of faith could potentially be censured. Interestingly, this largely paralleled the parameters set forth in the Edict of Nantes, which mandated matters of practice, not beliefs.⁵³

⁵⁰ *Works* 5:15

⁵¹ Bruce G. Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers: Canada's "Heroic Age" Reconsidered*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985),323.

⁵² *Works*, 5: 15-16

⁵³ Holt, 167.

Champlain's concerns over de Caën's religion were warranted. Conflict arose in 1622 between the newly appointed group, whose associates were of mixed faith, and colonists already in New France. In one such confrontation two associates of Guillaume de Caën, incidentally both Catholic, clashed over how Catholics and Protestants ought to properly worship in the tightly confined areas of a Compagnie de Caën naval vessel. In the dispute, "La Ralde," Guillaume de Caën's first lieutenant, feuded with "Hebert," a subordinate to both men. Champlain recounts:

The dispute came to be one on the subject of religion, although both were Roman Catholics. De Caën himself (Guillaume) belonged to the so-called Reformed Religion, and was accustomed to have prayers said in his cabin in the stern of the vessel, while the Catholics were at their devotions in the bow. While Hebert was in charge, the prayers went on as when the chief was there; but when La Ralde arrived as lieutenant and commander, he wanted the Catholics to come and do their praying in the cabin, and the so-called Reformers should be in their proper place, and do theirs in the bow.⁵⁴

Ultimately the matter appeared more a dispute over failure to recognize hierarchy and rank, but that religion served as a flashpoint demonstrated the tension-filled atmosphere in which these men existed. Champlain continues writing, "A great dispute arose, which was appeased by the intervention of some Recollet Fathers. Hebert was in the wrong in this quarrel, and was not reasonable about it."⁵⁵ Ironically, Champlain's judgment following the incident actually supported the Protestant side. Hebert had broken the stated chain of command, and although he was attempting to favor Catholic interests, both Champlain and select Recollet Fathers supported the Protestant side in this instance. Perhaps their interests lie in solely maintaining order, but order in support of the Protestant cause suggested a degree of acceptance for the opposite religion.

⁵⁴ *Works*, 5: 85-86. Of further significance is Champlain's use of the word "chief" in describing Guillaume de Caën. While there are no doubt potential issues in LeSeur's translation, the use of the word "chief" still suggests that Guillaume de Caën held a position of authority over Champlain.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 86

Although this incident favored Protestant interests, and ultimately the secular authority of the *Compagnie de Caën*, there would be continued tension between Protestant and Catholic rivals within the colony. A similar issue over proper worship practices sprang up in 1626, when a number of Protestant sailors violated restrictions on psalm-singing following the departure of Emery de Caën, then second in command of the company.⁵⁶ In recounting the experience, Champlain writes:

On the fourteenth of the same month, Father La Nouë arrived from Tadoussac, and told us that since Emery had left there, the sailors had paid no attention to the restrictions that he had left at his departure in the matter of psalm-singing; they went on with it in spite of these, and in such a way that all the savages could hear them from the shore. There is no use in talking to them; it is their great zeal for their faith that impels them.⁵⁷

David Hackett Fischer references this same incident choosing to expound on Champlain's ability to mediate the difficult religious environment.⁵⁸ In actuality, Champlain did nothing to address the situation, choosing instead to ignore the overzealous psalm-singing. Again, we see a tacit acceptance of the religious environment of New France.

In addition to creating a more liberal religious environment the *Compagnie de Caën* also made significant contributions to the infrastructural base of Quebec, and ultimately paved the way for more complete colonization of New France. As a semi-private commercial, company, profits were the primary motivation, yet the basis of the monopoly rights also required the company to support colonization.⁵⁹ Thus, an analysis of the company based on material success must also measure their level of contribution to the overall well-being of the colony. Like all of the commercial companies in early New France, the *Compagnie de Caën* maintained an uneasy balance between its desire to profit via the fur trade and its responsibilities as colonizers in the

⁵⁶ Works 5: 200-207. This date represents an estimate based on Champlain's and account of details over a nearly six month period.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 206-207

⁵⁸ Fischer, 379-380.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 604.

New World. The specific requirements of the agreement for the *Compagnie de Caën* required it to pay Champlain's salary and to establish six Recollet missionaries and to settle six families in New France—both of which it met easily. It is more difficult to quantify just how successful the *Compagnie de Caën* was via the fur trade, yet there are indications that its business was lucrative. Following the eventual revocation of the *Compagnie de Caën's* monopoly, a complaint lodged in 1642 to the royal council on behalf of the *Compagnie de la Nouvelle-France* references a payment of some 150,000 livres to Guillaume de Caën for reimbursement following his loss of the fur trade monopoly.⁶⁰ Guillaume De Caën's success in obtaining this reimbursement, in conjunction with the *Compagnie de la Nouvelle-France's* consternation over the amount of payment, suggests relative success for the company while still in its existence, as well as a court system more sympathetic to Protestant legal claims—a direct result of the Edict of Nantes. Gayle Brunelle offers further contextual evidence for the economic success of the *Compagnie de Caën*. In her examination on profit and economic security amongst the sixteenth and seventeenth century merchant classes, writing, “In the midsixteenth century personal wealth in the range even of twenty thousand livres constituted an impressive accumulation of capital.”⁶¹

Furthermore, in 1624 Guillaume de Caën obtained a seigneurial grant for Cap Tourmente, a tract of agricultural land surrounding Quebec, an achievement unrealized by his Protestant

⁶⁰*Raisons de la Compagnie de la Nouvelle-France pour empêcher sa dépossession ou du moins pour porter le roi à lui accorder des conditions dont elle puisse se contenter*, 1663 in Library and Archives of Canada: Digital Collection, trans. Malcolm Surer, URL: http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=2318412&rec_nbr_list=2318412,2318376,2318411,3075912 (Accessed October 3, 2010); A more complete discussion on conversion of monetary units to a modern equivalent is provided in David Hackett Fischer's *Champlain's Dream*, 632-633. Fischer's findings suggest no single estimate is sufficient to provide readers with an acceptable answer. However, as a basis of context Fischer utilizes wage information available for the settlers of New France. In 1608, “Gentlemen” were paid 500 livres for two years service. While over four decades earlier, this nonetheless provides us with some contextual understanding for the substantial compensation granted to de Caën in 1642.

⁶¹ Brunelle, 83. Although Brunelle's focus is primarily on the sixteenth century, many of her figures carry into the seventeenth century and prove useful for the purposes of context. The sum of 150,000 livres was substantial, even in the seventeenth century.

predecessors.⁶² Seigneurial grants, what essentially amounted to French feudal land titles, helped divide the land amongst prominent members of French society. Although the implication of de Caën's seigneurial title and the role of the seigneurial system was largely symbolic in the early stages of New France, it was nonetheless of great magnitude.⁶³ According to Brunelle, "Most merchants aspired to achieve a fortune based at least in part on landed wealth. Only a minority of the investors possessing the means to acquire substantial landholdings failed to do so. Land was the only really secure foundation capable of allowing them or their descendants to adopt the genteel lifestyle indispensable to noble status."⁶⁴ For the first time in Canada's history, the Huguenot leader of a commercial monopoly was also given an important landholding title, a development that must not be understated. In the early seventeenth century, the seigneurial system was the primary method of land distribution, which served to encourage permanent settlement. Although just one example, and largely symbolic, it nonetheless reveals both the preeminence of Guillaume de Caën and the potential for a French Canadian society shaped not by division, but by cohesion.

Coinciding with de Caën's attaining of the seigneurial grant, the colony witnessed important infrastructural improvements, which would encourage greater self-sufficiency.

Historian Bruce Trigger examines these contributions, writing:

It is wrong to conclude that the de Caëns sought only to draw profits from the fur trade and that they totally ignored settlement. Their company financed the construction of the fort at Quebec and replaced the wooden habitation with a new stone structure. The new habitations consisted of two wings with defensive turrets at the four corners, while a semi-circular fortification commanded the river and moats surrounded the entire structure.⁶⁵

⁶² William Bennett Munro, *Documents relating to the seigniorial tenure in Canada, 1598-1854*, (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1908), 4.

⁶³ Richard Colebrook Harris, *The Seigneurial System in Early Canada: A Geographical Study*, (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1984), 7.

⁶⁴ Brunelle, 86.

⁶⁵ Trigger, 324.

The replacement of the wooden structure with a more permanent stone one suggests the de Caëns were committed to New France for the entirety of their monopoly, and beyond. In order to protect their investment and to ease life in the New World, they committed resources to establishing a permanent presence and to the defense of the colony. This commitment to defense was not unwarranted.

Challenges to the monopoly, both from fellow countrymen and other Europeans, were persistent in the lucrative fur trading grounds of Canada. Champlain references two particular incidents involving smugglers from La Rochelle while the monopoly was in the hands of the de Caëns. Champlain's depiction of the events presents a dramatic portrayal of the contested economic environment and of the precarious religious divisions within New France. He writes, "...near Tadoussac he (Guillaume de Caën) had met with a small smuggler from La Rochelle, of about forty-five tons, and had got so close to her, that talking could be heard from ship to ship, both being under sail; but that the one from La Rochelle being the better sailer, had got away. A fine chance was thus lost, for the crew of that vessel had done a large trade in furs."⁶⁶ In a later incident, again involving smugglers from La Rochelle, Champlain evokes the natural imagery of the landscape in describing the encounter, writing "After our departure, Sieur de Caën sent a vessel to the spot, but it was too late; the birds had flown a day or two earlier. Nothing was found but the nest, a kind of palisade that they had erected to guard against surprise while they were trading. The palisade was torn down and burnt."⁶⁷

It is Champlain's characterization of the smugglers as hailing from La Rochelle that is most important here. As La Rochelle was the largest Protestant stronghold in France, one can deduce these illegal traders were Huguenots. Throughout Champlain's writings he references

⁶⁶ *Works*, 5: 12.

⁶⁷ *Works*, 5: 50-51.

interactions with Protestants, both positive and negative, quite carefully. In this specific instance, Champlain's word choice of "La Rochelle"—the Protestant state within the French state—imparts to his reader subtle, yet vital clues about the ambiguous nature of identity in the seventeenth century Atlantic World. Rather than describing these illegal traders as mere Protestants, or of the "Reformed Religion," he specifically references their home city—a city that would remain a bastion of Protestant extremism until the late 1620s. This was in stark contrast from standard accounts of interactions with Protestants like Guillaume de Caën. Furthering the complexity of this relationship was Guillaume de Caën's role in the encounters. The tensions between the *Compagnie de Caën* and the illegal La Rochelle traders pitted Protestant against Protestant, all while the company served under the auspices of the Catholic king, Louis XIII. The conflict represented a move away from extremism that had plagued both sides throughout the sixteenth century. Cooperation was possible amongst former Protestant and Catholic rivals and New France and the *Compagnie de Caën* provided the impetus for this collaboration. Yet this partnership remained tenuous. In trying to protect his economic interests, Guillaume de Caën actively sought the destruction of his Protestant brethren on behalf of a Catholic king and nation, which would soon revoke his exclusive monopoly, lay siege to the most important Protestant city in France, and deny the hard-earned rights of toleration that had helped create the colony of New France.

The gradual decline of the *Compagnie de Caën* began with the ascension of Cardinal Armand Jean du Plessis de Richelieu. Under Richelieu's tutelage, France would adopt a more restrictive religious policy within Canada, yet at the same time would make alliances with Protestant factions during the Thirty Years War. While Richelieu's broader, foreign policy was conflicted, his policy for New France was clear—the eventual exclusion of all Protestants from

New France. But, the decline of the *Compagnie de Caën* would not happen overnight. At first, a reorganization took place within the company which weakened the direct influence of Guillaume de Caën, but did not eliminate his authority entirely. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the issue of religious practice in the packed quarters of a company vessel, in conjunction with negative reports from Catholic priests in New France, had sealed Guillaume de Caën's fate.⁶⁸ Richelieu's ascension coupled with the 1625 resignation of Montmorency, one of Guillaume's staunchest advocates, meant that he now lacked the necessary support within royal circles to maintain his grip on the monopoly.⁶⁹ As a result, the new viceroy, Ventadour, required de Caën to name a Catholic to command the company's ships. In recounting the period of tense negotiation Champlain writes:

Sieur de Caën came to Paris, where he met with a good deal of opposition from the old shareholders (from the *Compagnie de Rouen* and *Saint-Malo*) which brought on proceedings amongst them before the Council, with the expectation that they would come to a friendly understanding between the two parties. Besides this, his Lordship (Ventadour) was dissatisfied with the Sieur de Caën owing to the report which had reach him that he had caused prayers of their so-called [Reformed] Religion to be said publicly within the river St. Lawrence, and had desired Catholics to attend them, a thing which his Lordship had forbidden him to do. These accusations the Sieur de Caën denied, saying that it was all hatred and malice on the part of his rivals, who were stirring up all the trouble they could against him.⁷⁰

In spite of the recriminations against him, the body of evidence sides overwhelmingly with Guillaume de Caën. Why would de Caën, who had grown increasingly wealthy and remained steadfastly committed to the colonization of New France, choose to incite conflict within New France over seemingly mundane religious customs? His actions routinely proved he was not an extremist. He had little motive to do so and had long been comfortable with the system of toleration established after the Edict of Nantes. Furthermore, he had sought to eliminate the illegal La Rochelle smugglers, who were in all likelihood also Protestant. While there had certainly been discord amongst Protestants and Catholics in New France during the reign of the

⁶⁸ Ibid, 402-405.

⁶⁹ Fischer, 392.

⁷⁰ *Works* 5: 150

Compagnie de Caën, it paled in comparison to the situation in France, where tensions between Protestants and Catholics continued to escalate. Nonetheless, Guillaume de Caën would need to make significant concessions in order to maintain even a portion of his monopoly. After what Champlain called a “great deal of contention,” new terms were agreed upon in which Guillaume de Caën was required to pay a percentage of new capital investment in the colony and to appoint a Catholic to command his vessels. His right to travel to New France was also revoked.⁷¹

Undaunted and committed to participating in at least some capacity in the Atlantic endeavor, Guillaume de Caën continued to prepare his ships for the trans-Atlantic voyage, and, as Champlain writes, “to put on board such things as he judged necessary for the settlement in Quebec.”⁷² Although dedicated to the long-term success of Quebec, he was still a merchant at heart. A number of Catholic priests, along with a crew of some twenty workmen sought passage to New France during this same period. Now prohibited from visiting New France, Guillaume de Caën, recognizing the opportunity and possessing the resources to do so, contracted a boat to the men at a cost of 3,500 livres.⁷³ This amount more than covered the required percentage of reinvestment as stated in the new terms of his company’s monopoly. Although de Caën was legally barred from traveling to New France, he could still play an important role in contributing to the colonies well-being, and make a living by doing so. Perhaps recognizing his grip on the monopoly was growing increasingly fragile, and seeking to clear his name from the accusations presented at the royal council, de Caën undertook a last ditch effort to convince those aboard his ships of his innocence. Champlain recalled the seemingly incessant delays prior to their departure, writing:

⁷¹ Ibid, 149-152.

⁷² Ibid, 152.

⁷³ Ibid, 153.

We were in the roadsted until the twentieth of the said month (April, 1626), when we weighed anchor and got under way at one o'clock in the afternoon, but merely tacked to and fro waiting for the Sieur de Caën, who wanted to give some order to the said La Ralde and Emery his nephew. About six o'clock in the evening de Caën arrived, administered the oath to the said La Ralde and the men of his crew, and gave the instructions which he desired should be followed on the voyage; after which he read publicly before the whole crew and others a small book containing a number of things which he was accused of having done.⁷⁴

This was in many ways, de Caën's farewell to his monopoly. Although he still maintained a marginal level of control, he nonetheless realized his power and influence was slipping away. Champlain does not include what de Caën said, only writing "there were some present... who were not particularly pleased."⁷⁵ As many of the men on the ship had worked for Guillaume de Caën for some time, one can assume those "who were not particularly pleased" were in Richelieu's inner circle, and were overtly Catholic, and thus unhappy with de Caën's presence on the ship. Curiously, Champlain does not weigh in on the matter. Perhaps he too recognized the future state of affairs for New France. He had worked in the service of the *Compagnie de Caën* for nearly half a decade at this point and had witnessed significant gains for the colony, even bringing his wife to New France during the period.⁷⁶ The course of New France was about to change significantly. The rise of Richelieu and the decline of religious tolerance within Canada, coupled with increased warfare at home and the subsequent extension of military action into the Atlantic World, would ultimately threaten the very existence of the colony.

In the spring of 1627 the *Compagnie de Caën* would finally lose its monopoly and trading privileges in New France. Richelieu established the *Compagnie de la Nouvelle-France* (also called *Compagnie des Cent-Associés*), a collection of one hundred stockholders, all Catholic.⁷⁷ The message could not have been clearer; Richelieu intended for New France to be a purely Catholic colony. It is crucial to understand the complexity of the politico-religious

⁷⁴ Ibid, 154.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 154.

⁷⁶ Fischer, 386.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 404-405.

environment in Europe during this period to appreciate the significance of Richelieu's decision. The 1627 Catholic siege of the Protestant stronghold, La Rochelle, signaled an important breakdown in domestic Catholic-Protestant affairs, as well as a collapse of foreign relations between France and England. Richelieu, for his part, would eventually ally with Protestant forces against the rival Catholic Hapsburg family in 1631—something previously inconceivable in the throes of Reformation Europe. Thus, we see just a glimpse of the intricacy of international affairs during this period. But where does de Caën factor into the equation? Following his loss of the monopoly in New France, the *Compagnie des Cent-Associés* took control of colonization efforts. Unfortunately for Richelieu they would not maintain possession of the colony for very long.

Merchant Rivalry and New France Dispossessed

That the near immediate demise of the *Compagnie des Cent-Associés* and the loss of French possessions in Canada came at the hands of the Kirke brothers demonstrated Richelieu's complete misunderstanding of the vital role Protestants played in shaping the Atlantic World. The colony of New France had been supported, administered, and largely governed by Huguenot interests dating back to 1588. While the colony did not grow tremendously over this period, it was nonetheless a stable settlement that demonstrated promise for the near future. Any potential failings of New France were a result of inconsistent royal policies stemming from an unwillingness to fully recognize the potential of the Canadian experiment. Although it possessed ample resources, the *Compagnie des Cent-Associés* lacked the knowledge of the North Atlantic that Protestants had possessed for over three decades. The *Compagnie des Cent-Associés* was comprised of native, Catholic Frenchmen—men with little to no experience navigating the

Atlantic or navigating the interconnected web of the Protestant international that had arisen following centuries of European warfare. Left largely to their own devices, independent trading companies like the *Compagnie de Caën* and the Merchant Adventurers to Canada cultivated important connections within the Atlantic world, with other Protestant groups, and with native groups in and around New France. These allies would prove crucial in an area still largely devoid of explicit imperial control.

Evidence suggests that the 1627 siege of the Protestant stronghold at La Rochelle directly contributed to the rise of the Kirke brothers and their eventual takeover of Quebec.⁷⁸ Like de Caën, the Kirkes were byproducts of an Atlantic world that helped foster conceptions of identity and allegiance that trended towards cosmopolitan. Born to an English father and French mother, their family had close ties to the merchant community that flourished between England and the port cities in Flanders and France. We do know that they were in all likelihood Protestant and while there is limited documentary evidence to corroborate clues about their early life, the English House of Lords did pass an act naturalizing the Kirke children in 1621.⁷⁹ Champlain himself offers further proof. Commenting on his surrender of Quebec to Lewis Kirke, he wrote:

But Louis Kirke was courteous, and, although the son of a Scotchman who had married at Dieppe, he was French in disposition and always had a liking for the French Nation; consequently he wished to induce these families and other Frenchmen, as far as he was able, to remain in this place, finding intercourse and conversation with them more agreeable than with the English, to whom his nature seemed to be adverse.⁸⁰

What Champlain meant by the phrase “French Nation” is difficult to discern. Nonetheless this affirmation of the apparent duality of the Kirkes identity further supports the idea that

⁷⁸ Kenneth Banks, *Chasing Empire Across the Sea: Communications and the State in the French Atlantic, 1713-1763*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), 18-19, and Nicholls, 78-81. Both Banks and Nicholls discuss the ways in which French violations of the Edict of Nantes, in conjunction with increased violence against Protestants living in France, drew English interests into direct conflict with France.

⁷⁹ Nicholls, 79.

⁸⁰ *Works*, 6: 71.

the Atlantic helped transform traditional perceptions of self. The apparent amorphous nature of identity for the Kirke brothers can help us to understand the motivations and allegiance of Guillaume de Caën, even in the face of personal and professional disgrace. If one could see oneself as Scottish, French, and Protestant—and choose willingly to support the English state against the French state—then being both French and Protestant, yet remaining in the service of an increasingly hostile homeland, was also possible. Richelieu’s failure to recognize the complexities of Protestant identity in the French Atlantic cost him New France and left a black mark on the *Compagnie des Cent-Associés*. He would learn his lesson quickly, however, eventually relenting on his decision to preclude Guillaume de Caën’s involvement in the colonial administration of New France. He might be able to stamp out Protestants as a political force in France, but he could not preclude them from remaining a dominant economic and social force in the greater Atlantic World.

The 1632 Treaty of St. Germain-en-Laye would eventually restore Quebec to the French, but only through careful diplomacy by the de Caëns in the interceding years could this take place. As early as 1630, less than two years after Quebec fell to the Kirke brothers, Guillaume de Caën appealed to the English courts for damages resulting from the Kirkes’ conquest. An official affidavit dated April 12, 1630 lists “Wil. de Caën” as “General of the Fleet of New France.”⁸¹ The title “General of the Fleet of New France” is important, because although de Caën was not included as a member of the *Compagnie de la Nouvelle-France*, it nonetheless seems as though he sustained his political influence and professional reputation within the Atlantic world. One must wonder what motivated Guillaume de Caën to continue to serve a

⁸¹ 'America and West Indies: April 1630', *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies, Volume 1: 1574-1660* (1860), pp. 112-114. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=69066&strquery=caen> [Accessed: October 24, 2010]

country which had taken so much from him. Additionally, why would Richelieu rescind de Caën's monopoly yet grant him the obviously prominent position of "General of the Fleet of New France"? Two weeks later the records indicate de Caën appointed a "Jacques Reynard" to act in his absence, as he could no longer stay in England.⁸² Although Guillaume de Caën had been barred from activity in New France, he nonetheless played an important role in the reclamation of debts, goods, and the colony itself from English hands.

Only when the Treaty of St. Germain-en-Laye was ratified by both the French and English monarchs could New France ever be restored fully. Champlain had worked tirelessly from 1629 to 1632 while in France, hoping to expedite the situation. Fischer proposes that Champlain's efforts were ultimately responsible for the eventual agreement between the two nations.⁸³ Fischer's findings are questionable however. Champlain had fallen out of favor amongst both Richelieu and Louis XIII following the loss of Quebec. Richelieu had committed enormous effort and resources aimed at securing New France following the revocation of the *Compagnie de Caën* monopoly only to see it fall into the hands of the English a year later. He could not have been pleased with Champlain's efforts in defending the territory, and thus it is unlikely he would have been swayed by Champlain's desire to return to the colony so soon after its demise. The text of the Treaty of St. Germain-en-Laye is most damaging to the assertion that Champlain was the central figure responsible for the return of Quebec to the French. In the entire body of the treaty Champlain is mentioned only once, this referring to a deposition on the goods present at the fort when it was surrendered. Guillaume de Caën meanwhile is referenced four times, and in each instance it involves a vital portion of the treaty pertaining to compensation or administration. The most revealing element of the treaty cites specific

⁸² Ibid, 112-114.

⁸³ Fischer, 436.

reimbursement for his losses—a substantial some for the period, reflecting the success of the *Compagnie de Caën*. It reads:

Further, the Sieur Burlamachy on behalf of his Majesty of Great Britain for and in the name of his said Majesty, at the request and command of the said Lord Ambassador in accord with the order the latter has from the King, and also in his proper and private name, has promised and does promise to pay to the said General de Caen in two months, from the day and date of the signature of these Presents, for all and each of the said peltries, knives, debts due by the Indians to the said General de Caen, and other merchandise to him belonging found in the said Forts of Kebec in the year 1629 the sum of 820,70c1 livres Tours currency, and further to have restored and given up to him in England the barque named the Helene [with] rigging, cannon, munitions and appurtenances according to the memoir which has been proved before the Lord of the Council of England. There shall further be restored to the said General de Caen in the establishment of Quebec all the casks of biscuits, barrels of peas, prunes, raisins, flour, and other merchandise and provisions for bartering which were in the said barque when she was taken in the year 1629, together with the merchandise belonging to him, which have been unloaded and left last year at Kebec in the River S. Laurent, country of New France.⁸⁴

Guillaume de Caën, not Champlain was the central figure responsible for the retaking of New France. Two additional pieces of documentary evidence support this assertion. First an agreement between Richelieu and Guillaume de Caen document entitled, sets the terms for the French takeover of the colony and fort from the English.⁸⁵ In this document we again see the terminology “General of the Fleet of New France” in describing Guillaume de Caën, thus confirming the English affidavit of 1630. But what is more compelling is the description of de Caën. The document, a series of terms between Cardinal Richelieu and Guillaume de Caën for the takeover of Quebec, asserts, “no one is more capable to take control of the country” and that de Caën’s familiarity with the people and the region will allow him to maintain control.⁸⁶ This choice of language and willingness to grant de Caën the central, administrative positions

⁸⁴ *Treaty of St. Germain-en-Laye, 1632* in Denys, Nicolas, 1598-1688. Ganong, William F., 1864-1941, eds. *The description and natural history of the coasts of North America (Acadia)* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1908), 229-239. The author notes the sum of “820,70c livres” was likely 82,700 livres. Nonetheless based on Fischer’s findings on monetary units, the apparent sum rewarded to Guillaume de Caën is significant.

⁸⁵ Correspondance generale: 1632 January 20, “Articles accordés” (*par le cardinal de Richelieu*) au sieur Guillaume de Caën “pour prendre possession du fort de Québec”, pp. 1, trans. Malcolm Surer, URL: http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3075912&rec_nbr_list=2318412,2318376,2318411,3075912 (Accessed: September, 30 2010). Hereafter *Articles Accordés*.

⁸⁶ *Articles Accordés*, 1.

represents a significant shift in Richelieu's foreign policy and suggests that even in the midst of increased restrictions on Protestants at home, there was still recognition of the value of Protestant involvement in the colonial endeavor. Furthermore, the document guarantees the de Caëns a monopoly on the fur trade for a period of one year, until the arrival of a new company.⁸⁷ Perhaps de Caën's years of quiet service to the nation and performance as commander of the fleet of New France impelled Richelieu's change of heart. Additionally, Guillaume de Caën's Protestantism might have been viewed as advantageous in this incident. The circumstances require him to obtain an English-held fort in a trans-Atlantic world rife with potential danger. For most of his life, de Caën seemingly acted as a political and religious intermediary within the Atlantic World, and thus the situation was familiar to him. While difficult to ascertain, this document nonetheless supports the assertion of Guillaume de Caën's centrality in the reclamation of Quebec.

In conjunction with this document exists an employment contract for forty workers to serve in the recovered colony. The contract sets forth terms of three years for each of the men, but what is more noteworthy is the personal information provided for each man. The makeup of the list suggests an effort to once again establish a more permanent settlement—and once again, it is under the direction of Guillaume de Caën. A number of carpenters, coopers, tool-makers and a doctor, are all listed.⁸⁸ There is an additional, peculiar aspect to the document. For most men, both a hometown and Catholic parish are given next to their name. Others however, possess only a hometown with no mention of a parish. For many of these same men, their hometowns,

⁸⁷ *Articles Accordés*, 3.

⁸⁸ Tabellionage du Havre: 1632 April 08, "*Contrat d'engagement de quarante hommes pour l'établissement d'une colonie en Nouvelle-France par le sieur Guillaume de Caën*," URL: http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3110271&rec_nbr_list=2318412,2318376,2318411,100198,3075912,3110271,3083316,3110317,112528,99969 (Accessed: October, 4 2010). Hereafter, *Contrat d'engagement*.

places like Dieppe and Rouen, possessed substantial Protestant populations.⁸⁹ What does the absence of parish and presence of typically Protestant cities tell us? Were these men Huguenots? While speculative, perhaps de Caën was able once again collect a company of men committed to the tolerant New France that had existed earlier in the century.

Clearly Guillaume de Caën still suffered a marginalized status within French society, even after obtaining the monopoly in New France again in 1632. The terms of the monopoly were to be terminated after only one year. Nonetheless, he had survived and, in many ways, thrived in the tumultuous politico-religious milieu of the seventeenth century Atlantic. His continued service to his country, even in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds, afforded him considerable influence in the Catholic-dominated government of his mother country. While he would never regain his position of prominence in New France, he would continue to garner accolades and titles for his service. In 1633, Richelieu would further compensate de Caën, naming him Baron of the Bahamas. Richelieu's gift of the barony, however, was a cruel kind of benevolence—terms of the title forbade de Caën from transporting Protestants to the islands.⁹⁰

Still, the gesture demonstrated something symbolically important about de Caën's life, indeed about the lives of many in the seventeenth century.

Conclusion

Gilles Paquet and Jean-Pierre Wallot's essay "Nouvelle France/Quebec/Canada: A World of Limited Identities" seeks to address the uniqueness of the Canadian experience within the greater Atlantic World. In it, they argue "that the inhabitants of the political entity now known as Canada never developed anything but limited identities, but that paradoxically those limited

⁸⁹ *Contrat d'engagement*, 1.

⁹⁰ Robert Curry, *Bahamian Lore* (Paris: Privately Published, 1930), 37.

identities, rather than reducing ‘national’ communicative competence, may have improved it.”⁹¹

The Canadian experience, particularly at its earliest stages, was shaped by common traits of freedom and independence, oftentimes devoid of the French desire for “order, symmetry and harmony.”⁹² Although they utilize the legendary *coureurs de bois* and the *habitants* as characterizations of these ideals, the *Compagnie de Caën* and the legacy of Huguenot contributions to New France also fall squarely within this realm. French royalists might be able to reduce the influence of Protestants in domestic politics, but they could not be ignored in the Atlantic. Although Protestants were restricted from settling permanently in New France after 1627, their presence nonetheless remained. Leslie Choquette presents evidence that suggests upwards of 6 percent of those who migrated to New France were of Huguenot lineage—and that those of Huguenot background had a higher rate of cultural persistence than their Catholic counterparts.⁹³ Ultimately, the Atlantic Ocean represented opportunity for seventeenth century French Protestants. Granted, this was a limited window of opportunity, but nonetheless it was an important one that historians have long ignored. For de Caën, that opportunity lay at first in the lucrative fur trade of New France. As tensions in France escalated, and the Atlantic World grew increasingly competitive and chaotic, economic opportunities diminished—yet the Atlantic still offered an alternative to more restrictive policies at home. It was in many ways a third sphere of experience, which would transform traditional conceptions of identity throughout the broader Atlantic World.

⁹¹ Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden, eds., *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 96.

⁹² *Ibid*, 99.

⁹³ Leslie Choquette, “A Colony of ‘Native French Catholics.’” In Bertrand Van Ruymbeke and Randy J. Sparks, eds., *Memory and Identity: The Huguenots in France and the Atlantic Diaspora*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 258-259.

Figure 1



Toussaint Dubreuil, *Portrait of French King Henri IV as Hercules Slaying the Lernaean Hydra (Catholic League)*, c. 1600

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-Series of complaints by the Company of New France against current conditions in Canada. A portion of the complaint refers to a 1642 court case brought by Guillaume de Caen in which the company was forced to pay restitution to the Compagnie de Caen. Additionally, the Company of New France present an interesting (and incorrect) depiction of events from 1628 in which the Kirke Brothers, British merchants in Canada, were forcefully removed by a force led by de Caen.

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-Contract of employment for forty men to establish a colony in New France under the direction of Guillaume de Caen. The contract includes the name of the forty men, as well as length of employment and expectation in the colony.

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-These collected works from Samuel de Champlain will allow me to further demonstrate the integral role played by the de Caen family in the formation of early New France. Champlain's relationship with both Emery and Guillaume is described throughout each of the works. Additionally, these volumes include correspondence between Champlain and his superiors in France, in which he is given directions on how to manage the de Caens' relationship and activity in New France.

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-The *Jesuit Relations* have long been a source for historians of early Canada. Written by Jesuit missionaries in the hinterlands of New France, the *Relations* is essentially an account of life in early Canada. There are baptismal records, accounts of interactions with natives, and descriptions of life in the frontier. Volumes 4-7 of the *Relations* will serve useful for my study because they present a Catholic assessment of the Huguenot de Caen trading company, and in doing so, often present a rather favorable depiction of both Emery and Guillaume. The secondary source material produced on this period of early Canada does not assess de Caen contributions in such a favorable light.

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Biography

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