Josslyn Ryan 10/02/18

Hist 1120

Reading Log #3

‘Nagging Wife Revisited’ an A Fille du Roi’s Passage

Women in history have commonly been misunderstood as the domesticated, stay at home wives. Initial intentions in the mid 17th century to the early 18th century, were to use women as an attraction to the business of the fur trade, and the colonization of what we know now as Canada.[[1]](#footnote-1) As historians have researched the countless women involved in the fur trade, many of these women being the filles du roi, we can understand that women’s roles went far beyond raising children, and keeping a nice home.[[2]](#footnote-2) Through Jan Noel’s article “‘Nagging Wife Revisited: Women and the Fur Trade in New France’”, and Adrienne Leduc’s “A Filles du Roi’s passage” we are enlightened by the irony of the filles du roi concept, and how the diverse roles of women in the fur trade were the backbone of the wealth from the fur trade.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Leduc’s letter to Jeanne Faucheux is not only a compassionate, personal document, but is full of information about what the filles du roi experienced on their travels, and their impressions on the ‘new world’. Recruited as potential wives for men involved in the fur trade and colonization of New France, the filles du roi travelled across sea in less-than ideal conditions, to marry within days of meeting their future husbands.[[4]](#footnote-4) “It must have been heartwarming to see the waving, cheering crowd gathered on the shore…”.[[5]](#footnote-5) Leduc writes multiple ironic passages similar to this, as the filles du roi were to “give themselves” to men they did not know in a world known as the “place of horrors”, only to escape the poverty in their home.[[6]](#footnote-6) As the filles du roi were chosen as a wife, their future husbands were to recite their assets and possessions, which in Noel’s article, we can see that many of these young women actually took control of while their husbands travelled, and weren’t just the “nagging wife” at home with her children.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Madelaine Roybon d’Allone, Maryanne La Marque, Louise Chartier de Lotbiniere, are a few of the small fraction of known women involved in the business of the fur trade.[[8]](#footnote-8) Noel’s article brings light to the fact that there was great diversity in women’s roles in the fur trade, but a large fraction of women were entrepreneurs of the business, or were the head of their husbands’ companies.[[9]](#footnote-9) Women sanctioned strategies that greatly improved the income and network of the fur trade, for example, Louise Denys de la Ronde created business with tanner Louis Mallet, and set up operations to tan hides that arrived from the trading posts, which eventually led to other women experimenting with the tanning processes, leaving behind larger assets.[[10]](#footnote-10) Women of this day were forced to be great multi-taskers as they were expected to keep a household, and raise children, however, they raised and taught their children the ways of the fur trade, and when old enough, would take on their own tasks in the business.[[11]](#footnote-11) Noel’s article as a whole argues that Peter Moogk’s statement of wives being “dependents” is incorrect, as women were entrepreneurs, farmers, and canoe builders; just a short list of women’s employment during the fur trade.[[12]](#footnote-12) Noel’s article brings forth specific names, among several areas of employment, however these are just small fractions of what historians know of. Indigenous women, example of the “small fry” group, had a significant role as well in the fur trade, however they’re roles and history is harder to trace.[[13]](#footnote-13)

The irony, and pride as a woman is incredible as we understand the filles du roi through Leduc’s letter, and Noel’s article. The fact that women were initially objectified as a tactic to enhance colonization and business, and became the backbone of both, is a profound topic and realization in history.

1. Jan Noel, “’Nagging Wife’ Revisited: Women and the Fur Trade in New France.” *French Colonial History 7,* 2006. 45-60. 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid., 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Adrienne Leduc, “A Filles du Roi’s Passage.” *Beaver 81,* no. 1 (Feb/Mar 2001). 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., Jan Noel, 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Jan Noel., 46-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid., 45-56. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid., 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid., 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid., 52 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ibid., 49-50. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)