

Reading Log #3
Ashley Stevens

HISTORY 1120-01
Dr. Tracy Penny Light
September 30th, 2018

In the journal article “‘Nagging Wife’ Revisited: Women and the Fur Trade in New France” by Jan Noel, the role that women held during the fur trade was revisited and reevaluated. The term “Nagging Wife” was a comment recorded by a highly respected historian, William J. Eccles. (45) Although he was alluding to the lie that women were only baiting men during the trading period, many historians have come forward to prove otherwise. Women held some of the most important roles during this time period. They held vital roles within the trading itself, assisted with the missions of the Jesuits, and used their natural skills to benefit the well-being of everyone during this historical time.

Women held very diverse roles within the fur trade, all of which they fulfilled with great bravery and content. According to the text, “...the leading exports from New France were the furs and hides of animals.” (46) Despite facing serious tribulations, Madeleine Roybon d Alione played an important role in trades. In 1675, she was given a plot of land near Fort Cataraqui. Madeleine began to set up trade deals with the native allies who were there, which eventually resulted in being held captive. The author then discusses that according to a 1708 decree, she was no longer able to trade. Then, in 1717, she started a petition to allow the Cataraqui trade to continue. (47) Another influential woman who obtained an important role in the fur trade was Madame Celeron. Based out of Fort Niagara, she traded fur and grain. She held a vital role of shipping it overseas to Quebec. (47)

Not only did the women get to participate in the fur trade, but they were able to give to both the Jesuits and the Crown. (50) The journal article records many women who selflessly gave to these causes. In 1743, Madame Goyau gave of her time as she baked and did laundry for the Huron mission. Similar to this, Madame LDeil Erailé traded the vermilion and

beads, and clothes she received for the mission. The author goes on to explain how Madame St. Martin sent the Jesuits all one hundred and forty-four livres that somebody else owed them for wheat. Not only did she pay the debt of someone else, she also gifted stockings to the mission of the Jesuits. (50) The author explains how the women also worked together to do smaller trades to benefit and help families within their communities. It was this kind of meaningful work that changed the lives of many and caused smaller relationships to flourish.

The fur trade was an important time for women to lead many and an even better launching into their vital roles in the workforce. The author discusses the different jobs that women held, and a few of them are: professional letter writer, singing teacher, sailor, upholsterer, and an errand runner for prisoners. (54) We can glean from their wide variety of jobs that the women “graced every class in society.” (54) Not only did the women hold important jobs they also fended for their families and cared for the children. This was only the brink of society seeing unstoppable women within the workforce.

After reading this journal article, it is clear that the “Nagging Wife” was only a false label presented by a historian who did not understand the fundamental role that the women had during the fur trade. Women were strategic traders, altruistic givers, and diligent mothers. They may not have been the ones who were always on the front lines, but they performed important acts behind the scenes that transformed the lives of many.

This article left me with a few questions, and they are as follows:

What happened to Madeleine Roybon d Alione as she was held captive?
How did she escape?
What was the pay difference between women and men during this time?
Was that a problem for them?
Did the children play any roles within the fur trade?
How much was beaver fur worth to the trader?

