



Pierre-Esprit Radisson: The Collected Writings, Volume 2: The Port Nelson Relations, Miscellaneous Writings, and Related Documents

Germaine Warkentin

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Pierre-Esprit Radisson (1636?-1710) was many men. He was a teenager captured, tortured, and adopted by the Mohawk, and a youth relishing the freedom of the wilderness. He was the French-born servant of an ambitious English trading company and a hapless petitioner at the court of Louis XIV. He was a central figure in the tug-of-war between France and England over Hudson Bay and a pretender to aristocratic status who had to defend his actions before James II. Finally, he was a retired "sea captain" trying to provide for his children, and despite the pension he had fought for, the "decay'd Gentleman" described in his burial record. Radisson's writings, characterized by hubris and contradiction, provoke many questions. Was he a semi-literate woodsman? Are his accounts of Native life ethnographically reliable? Can he be trusted to tell the truth about himself? How important were his explorations? All these questions are raised in this first critical edition of Radisson's writings in both English and French, which includes previously unknown documents. Volume 1 follows Radisson's account of the decade he spent, in part with his brother-in-law Médard Des Groseilliers, exploring far into the interior of North America. In Volume 2, Radisson recounts his part in the battle over possession of Hudson Bay waged in the 1680s by England and France, his difficulties at the French and English courts, and his struggle with the Hudson's Bay Company for his just reward. Striking a superb balance between accessible writing and comprehensive scholarship, this new edition of Radisson's writing is indispensable, definitive, and reasserts the important roles that Radisson played in seventeenth-century North American rivalries.

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