

[Page 16 - The Four Lives of the Micmac Copper Pot](#)

ISSUE : [Issue 24](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1979/12/1

clearly impressed him above all else were the coppersmiths who forged those marvelous kettles. Surely, he is said to have exclaimed, these artisans were relatives of the French monarch! What Denys meant was that the kettle was more to these people than simply a handy cooking vessel. Much more than that, we know that it was an instrument which pervaded the exchange economy (as a highly-prized commodity of trade), the ceremonial complex (as grave furniture, for instance) and the overarching belief system (like all other material culture, it was invested with an animating spirit), and, lastly, the settlement pattern (to the degree that it contributed to the overthrow of wooden cauldron-based territories). There is nothing remarkable about the first revelation • the copper kettle-as-commodity idea. We would expect as much. Moreover, those among us who are familiar with Northeastern ethnology and historic archaeology are aware of the spiritual (which includes ceremonial) role these trade goods came to have in native society. For these reasons, the first three kettle functions--commodity, grave furniture, and spiritual identity • will be given brief notice. It is the last function, the demographic function, which is novel to this study, and accordingly calls for extended commentary. After forty years of trafficking with the Acadian Indians, from 1632 to 1672, the aging Denys could write categorically that "the things which come from us ... (have) become to them an indispensable necessity. They have abandoned all their own utensils," he wrote in the late 1660's, "whether because of the trouble they had as well to make as to use them, or because of the facility of obtaining from us, in exchange for skins which cost them almost nothing, the things which seemed to them invaluable, not so much for their novelty as for the convenience they derived therefrom." The brisk trade in kettles he was alluding to owed its longevity and volume to various siphoning off processes which included, along with breakage and loss, a secondary trade with New England tribesmen. Thus Marc Lescarbot reported the Micmac sagamore, Messamoet, peddling "kettles, large, medium, and small, hatchets, knives, dresses, capes, red jackets, peas, beans, biscuits, and other such things" among the Saco River Algonkians, for which he was given corn, tobacco, beans, and pumpkins • plant domesticants which the Micmac were either unable or not inclined to grow. Another force behind this persistent, cumulative demand was the need to replace kettles that had been buried as ceremonial objects along with the human deceased. There were, in truth, few Indian customs which exercised the French as much as this one did. After a year spent outdoors on a scaffold, wrapped in a birchbark sheet, the dead had their bones gathered up and "placed in a new coffin or bier, also of Birch bark, and immediately after in a deep grave which they (the bereaved) had made in the ground." From Chrestien Le-Clercq, whose twelve-year ministry (1675- 1687) among the Micmac of the Gaspé Peninsula brought him into contact with a We Buy and We Sell and We're as Near as your Telephone Sid's Used Furniture Phone 564-6123 436 Charlotte Street, Sydney If you knit, you'll want something natural. Create your own fashions with our new 100% virgin wool yarns especially made for hand,



knitting. Our yarns are made in Atlantic Canada (Cape Breton) and have recently been introduced to the Canadian market. Write for sample 40-color shade cards and price lists. We offer special quantity discounts. Cape Breton Woolen Mills, R. R. #1, Cape Breton Island, N.S. BOA IHO (902) 828-2776 To High School students thinking of the future Think of a future in Agriculture The Nova Scotia Agricultural College is dedicated to helping young men and women prepare for a wide range of important occupations associated with food production, including related industries and management of our living environment. We offer technical courses: • Agricultural Business Technician • Agricultural Engineering Technician • Animal Science Technician • Farm Equipment Technician • Plant Science Technician • Biology Laboratory Technology • Chemistry Laboratory Technology • Farming Technology • Ornamental Horticulture Technology We offer university courses leading to: • Bachelor of Science in Agriculture (16 options) • Bachelor of Engineering in Agricultural Engineering • Doctor of Veterinary Medicine For more information contact The REGISTRAR, N.S. Agricultural College, Truro, N.S. B2N 5E3 Department of Agriculture & Marketing Hor>. Rogers. Bacon, Minister