TO AND THROUGH SAINT-PIERRE-ET-MIQUELON:

An Atlantic research voyage

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ABSTRACT: The research trajectory detailed in this article stems from a tenuous personal connection to Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, namely its links to my hometown of Granville, in Normandy, which for centuries supplied fishermen to work on the Grand Banks of Newfoundland. This long-buried memory of the ties between the Norman port and the small archipelago on the Canadian border was rekindled during my university studies on islands. The Channel Islands, within sight, were the focus of my initial research but, from a comparative perspective, Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon quickly emerged as another relevant option. This was the starting point of a research adventure punctuated by what I call 'created coincidences,' a notion perhaps less oxymoronic than it might seem. My experience demonstrates how research, while certainly a matter of rigour, can also be decisively influenced by chance. Indeed, choices, intuitions and more or less fortuitous encounters have shaped, influenced and enriched a research journey spanning several decades, from the initial phase of reflection to its application through numerous publications and participation in conferences. The following text provides an opportunity to revive and reflect on memories of fruitful encounters, geographical, certainly, but, above all, human.

KEYWORDS: Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, Granville, Acadia, Grand Banks, research path, created coincidence

The genesis of my connection with islands

If you are born in Granville, a French port in Normandy on La Manche (known in English as The English Channel), you become quickly familiar with islands. The first ones you hear about are the Chausey archipelago located a dozen kilometres offshore. Due to its position at the entrance to Mont Saint-Michel Bay, where tides are among the highest in the world, Chausey is a quaint place, an aquapelagic dream, an endless source of shellfish and crustacean fishing pleasure. No better description of the simultaneously tyrannical and beautiful tidal space has been provided than that made by Gilbert Hurel, a great sailor and delicate writer, who wrote once:

> *the tide rules the roost. It reigns supreme here, deciding when the boats will sail, transforming sailors into pedestrians at will, setting the fishing times and the departure times of the motorboats, imposing bizarre schedules on everyone… enough to bewilder the visitor who, for the first time, in the very spot where a few hours earlier he thought he had arrived by boat, sees a strange continent appear, flowing with seawater*. (Site classé No. 50009, nd).

But you soon realise that further on there are other islands, notably Jersey, the southernmost, Channel Island which is sometimes visible on the horizon from La pointe du Roc in Granville when the weather is clear. Starting from there, you have to progress northward to understand what L'archipel de la Manche – as Victor Hugo called it – means. As you travel up the Cotentin peninsula, the names of Jersey and Guernsey become a tangible reality inscribed in the seascape. From the heights of Tourville, Jersey stands out clearly on the horizon. From Carteret, its houses can be seen, and even the silhouette of Mont Orgueil Castle, in the parish of Saint-Martin. At the cape of Flamanville, almost at the tip of the Cotentin, the view extends to Guernsey and encompasses the entire archipelago, up to the remote and northernmost Alderney, the closest island to France but also the least reachable. The proximity is striking. These lands are both English and Norman, they are renowned for their prosperity and that their institutions retain terminologies and practices sometimes described as medieval.

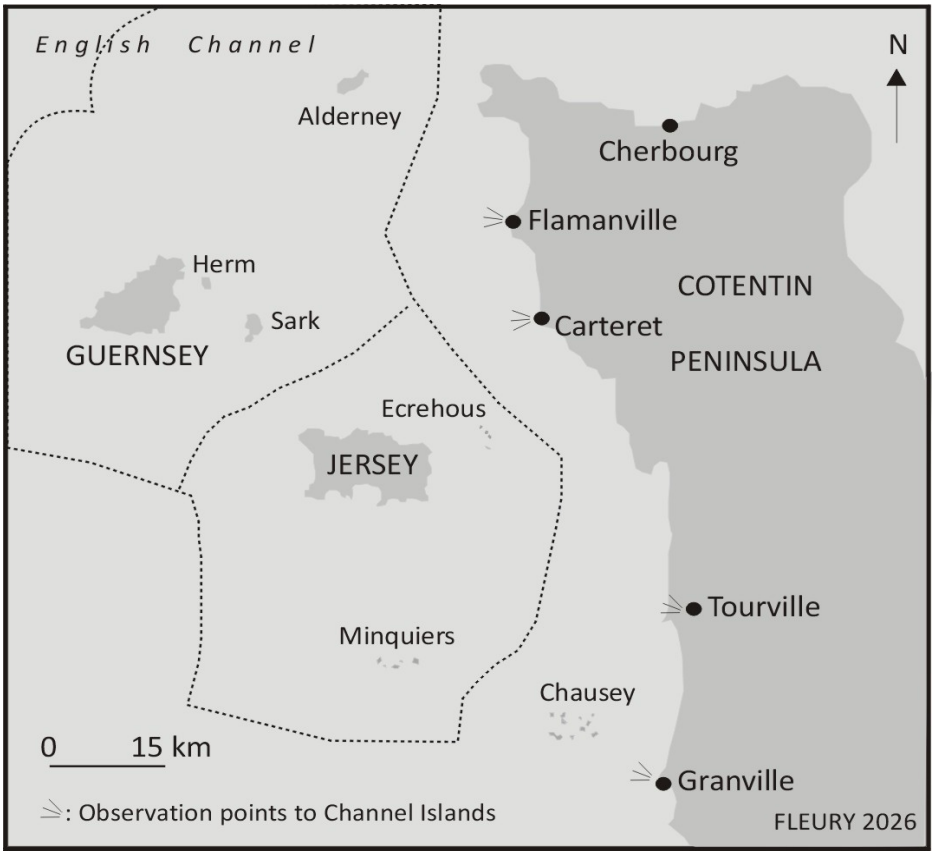

Figure 1 – The Channel Islands, within sight of the Normandy coastline (Christian Fleury 2026).

But we are not done with the constellations of Anglo-Norman islands yet. In both the Minquiers and Écréhous reefs, only a handful of islets are present at high tide. However, at low tide, thousands of hectares of rocks and vast stretches of sand intersected by channels are revealed. Unless you are one of the few regulars familiar with the place it is risky to try and explore its interior since the risks come from everywhere, depending on the time of day,

the tide coefficient, the swell and the wind conditions - all highly variable factors that determine the individual danger posed by each of the thousands of rocks, visible or hidden.

Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, the lost outpost of the Granville fishing industry

Through the experiences described above, the foundations of an insular tropism were established and satiated over time by numerous incursions in the multiscale labyrinthine marine space of La Manche. But another archipelago was lurking in the background of the collective memory of the small town. Granville, whose fishing industry is now confined to the coastal area, was for centuries a major centre for outfitting vessels fishing for Atlantic cod (*Gadus morhua*) on the Grand Banks of Newfoundland. In June 1536, Jacques Cartier, returning from his second trip to Canada, took possession of an island off the Southern coast of Newfoundland in the name of King François 1st that he named Saint-Pierre. On this occasion, he encountered several ships in the bay, which he quotes as coming from "both France and Brittany" (Grandcolombier.com). Although it cannot be ruled out, there is no evidence that any of these ships came from Granville. However, more precise sources indicate that Granville ships frequented this area towards the end of the 16th century (La Morandière, 1986). Thus began a long period that would stretch until the 20th century, during which Granville was one of the main French ports involved in the Atlantic cod fishery. Despite fluctuations due to the frequently confrontational relationship between England and France, which periodically made this activity dangerous or even impossible, the figures attest to its importance. In 1786, 4,114 sailors embarked on 105 ships bound for the Grand Banks, making Granville one of the country's two leading fishing ports, along with Saint-Malo. The following years were marked by a decline due to repeated conflicts, first the Revolutionary Wars and then the Napoleonic Wars. Business resumed definitively from 1815 onwards, at the end of the conflicts between the two powers. Some people involved in the fishing industry decided to establish themselves in Saint-Pierre despite the official unwillingness to encourage the development of a too large colony on such a small territory subject to a subarctic climate (and therefore poorly suited to hosting a permanent population). But the abundance of fish stocks was a strong incentive for investors, traders and fishermen. Located in the immediate vicinity of one the most productive fishing grounds at that time, at the confluence of the warm waters of the Gulf Stream and the cold waters of the Labrador Current, Saint-Pierre gradually established itself as a vital fishing centre, forming a community that defied government restrictions. A significant portion of the metropolitan population that gradually settled in Saint-Pierre originated from Granville. A survey of all marriages celebrated in Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon between 1816 and 1889 attests to this: 561 people among the 3,165 were born in the Granville region (Girardin, 1990).

At the beginning of the last century, with the evolution of the fishing industry's commercial organisation and the preeminence of its neighbour Saint-Malo, which was far better equipped with port facilities, Granville experienced a rapid decline and an unfortunate end. On April 11th, 1933, the three-masted *La Thérésa* became stuck in the exit to Granville harbour due to the risky manoeuvre of another vessel whose captain had mistakenly believed that the simultaneous exit of both ships was possible. This fatal error in judgment resulted in the ship's irretrievable damage to *La Thérésa* and the end of a four-century-long story of bountiful fishing, profits for ship owners and livelihoods for sailors, but also punctuated by tragedies such as numerous shipwrecks and immense suffering due to the harshness of trips sometimes lasting more than six months. To remind everyone each year of the largely forgotten link between the last French territory in North America and the Norman port, Granville has organised an annual carnival since 1875 that was inscribed in UNESCO's

Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2016. The carnival, which is held before Easter, was an occasion for celebration and jollity before local sailors headed off to work in the north-western Atlantic fishing grounds for extended durations. While the sailors no longer depart, memory of their travails is perpetuated by the event.

What I learnt in the books about Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon

My engagement with Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon could have ended with the islands' historic connection to Granville but was raised anew in the context of my university studies. After completing the required assignments for their Bachelor's degree, Geography Master's students are often drawn to topics dealing with familiar geographical objects. This was the case for me. Submitted in 1996, a Master thesis entitled *Dynamiques littorales et régionales de l'espace granvillais*[1] ('Coastal and regional dynamics of the Granville region') led me to explore the border reality of the Norman-Breton Gulf through the ambivalent impacts that a foreign neighbour – in this case, the Channel Islands – induced in the coastal area. It was not a great discovery to identify that Granville is a border town and Jersey a border island but the fact that I had moved from intuitive knowledge to reflection on a geographical phenomenon supported by precise data led me to consider a well-defined academic extension around this notion of border islands when I decided to engage in a PhD thesis two years later. The comparative method is widespread in geography and its application to three elements is considered convenient and potentially fruitful. Further investigation of the Jersey example was a natural next step. Among the fifteen or so cases defined by a set of criteria relating in particular to the size of the island and the distance from foreign land, Trinidad – located twenty kilometres off the Venezuelan coast at the mouth of the Orinoco River – was a welcome opening onto a much less familiar environment. And Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, roughly at the same distance from Canada, and so including in the short list, was clearly an attractive personal option.

Besides the initial – and passive – link as a person born in Granville, this designation as one of the case studies in my doctoral thesis represented a second decisive step in my connection with Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon. But it was time to move beyond stereotypes and deepen basic knowledge of the history and geography of the small archipelago, as well as to prepare for fieldwork. This classically consists of an exhaustive review of the academic literature and all types of more or less relevant publications. Islands are often fascinating subjects of study because of their inherent ambivalence: while they are territories explicitly delimited by their coastline, and therefore subject to a strong sense of belonging to a community and a certain circumspection towards outsiders, they are also sometimes, simultaneously, places identified on the world map by their strategic or economic value. On its modest scale, Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon is no exception to this principle.

[1] 'Coastal and regional dynamics of the Granville area.

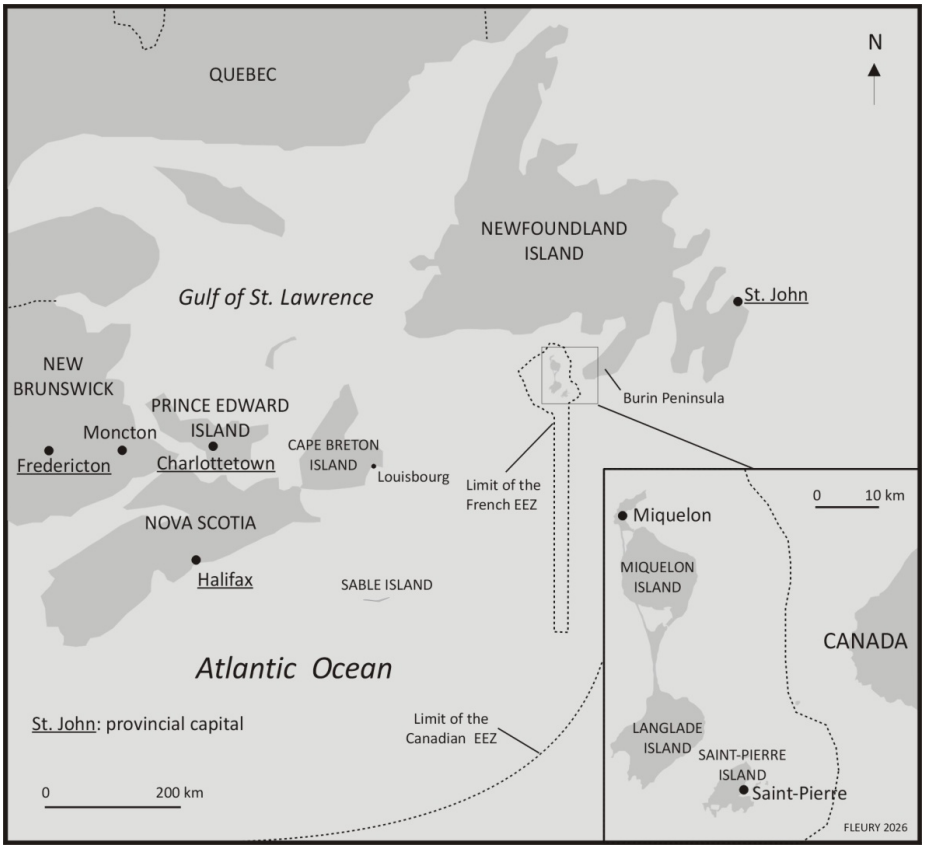

Figure 2 – Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, French territory in contact with Canada (Christian Fleury 2026).

The date of the commencement of permanent settlement on the islands is somewhat vague and was, anyway, interrupted by the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) which deprived France of a large part of its Acadian colony in Nova Scotia, leaving it with only the islands of Saint-Jean and Royale (today, Prince Edward Island and Cape Breton Island, respectively). According to the same agreement, Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon was now under British rule and almost all of its inhabitants relocated to Louisbourg, the new built French fortress on Cape Breton Island (Figure 2). Fifty years later, the outcome of the Seven Years' War was even more catastrophic for France in North America, since the Treaty of Paris in 1763 marked the end of New France and the total control of Canada by Great Britain. Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, however, was the subject of the only concession in North America made by the British winner: the small archipelago was granted to France on the strict condition that it was used only as a fishing base and was devoid of any military purpose. A particularly turbulent period of about fifty years nonetheless began for the small colony. In Versailles, any ambitions for development were thwarted. In 1767, 760 Acadians – principally farmers – who had recently settled in Miquelon were repatriated to France before being allowed to return the following year. When the French did not relocate their citizens, the British did. Whenever hostilities broke out between the two powers, Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon was devastated, its houses razed, and its inhabitants deported to France. This occurred three times: during the American

Revolutionary War (1778), the French Revolution (1794) and during the rise of Napoleonic France (1803). A year after the Treaty of Vienna in 1816, the colony was reborn and experienced prosperity. Despite the ups and downs linked to the global situation, market fluctuations and the evolution of fishing and ship propulsion techniques, the following century was marked by the positive trajectory of the small colony. Settlement was gradual, fueled by various currents. As mentioned earlier, the Granville region led the way, far ahead of Saint-Malo. People from the Basque Country, primarily called upon to work in the canneries being established in Saint-Pierre, also constituted a significant population of a few hundred people. The marked imbalance between men and women was largely offset by numerous marriages with young women from neighbouring Newfoundland, often of Irish or sometimes Native American descent.

After a particularly chaotic first half of the 20th century for the fishing industry,[2] the post-Second war recovery was vigorous, and Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon experienced a 'golden age' with involvement at various levels of the fishing industry. In addition to fishermen, local merchants provided supplies to the large trawlers of Spain, Portugal, Japan, South Korea, Russia and West Germany, among others, which operated in their hundreds in the area. A substantial volume of catch was processed locally, particularly from the 1950s onwards, in a factory that employed at its peak over 300 people, a considerable number for a population of a few thousand. However, this period did not last long**.** From the early 1970s onward, Canada, exasperated by the presence of such a large number of ships near its shores, began a process of expelling foreign fleets, relying on the evolution of international law which notably led to the creation of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) in 1982. The presence of a small French archipelago represented an inconvenience that was addressed by both parties in adversarial terms. French historical fishing rights were gradually eroded until 1992, a year marked by a double shock, resulting in the near extinction of the activity that had been the raison d'être of the colony. That year, the New York arbitration tribunal granted the archipelago an EEZ whose truncated size and shape sparked anger that has not subsided decades later (Figure 2). Meanwhile, Canada, relying on alarming scientific findings, imposed a moratorium on cod fishing, which was only very partially lifted four years later, but at levels insufficient to allow for a genuine economic recovery for Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon.

Chance and opportunities

In order to further my research, I knew that I needed to embark on field research in the form of scheduled interviews but also hoped for fortuitous discoveries able to modify or influence the course of my project. Several intertwined elements, each with different temporalities and spatial scales, combined to fuel and enrich my thinking. At this point in the narrative, it is important to focus on an element that quickly proved to be the determining factor in my doctoral research: what I define, somewhat paradoxically, as *created coincidences* or *induced chance*. In my view, this stems from the simple, obvious, even naive principle that the more one moves, the more people one meets and the greater the chance of discovering elements that can enrich or modify the initially planned approach. This observation holds true even for the most innocuous and temporally distant actions. This was the case with a very ordinary act performed in a second-hand bookstore in Montreal one summer day in 1989, at a time

[2] During this period, three successive events led to an interruption of the fishing industry for several years: the two world wars and, in between, the ten years during which the activities of the port of Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon were entirely devoted to the trafficking of alcohol intended to circumvent the prohibition laws in force in the United States and Canada.

when I had no interest other than simple curiosity. That day I stumbled upon a book whose intriguing title, *Du continent perdu à l'archipel retrouvé: Le Québec et l'Amérique française* ('From the Lost Continent to the Rediscovered Archipelago, Quebec and French America') (Louder and Waddell, 1983) caught the eye of the novice geography student that I was. The use of the archipelagic analogy is common and sometimes rather inaccurate. This was certainly not the case here, as it referred to North America, within which lay a set of French-speaking metaphoric islands and islets surrounded by an English-speaking 'ocean.' Quebec was thus cited as the main island, and one could imagine its secondary ones in New Brunswick, Louisiana, New England or in Francophone communities of Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan or Alberta, as well as a myriad of smaller pockets, sometimes reduced to mere traces, which one of the book's strengths was to reveal to us. It is interesting to note that the two researchers who edited this book were native English speakers, both professors at Laval University in Quebec. Dean Louder was from Provo, Utah, while Eric Waddell had grown up in northern England.

A dozen years later, I learned at the last minute that Dean Louder was coming to the University of Caen as co-supervisor of a local PhD student. After attending a seminar he was participating in, I had a brief, informal chat with him during which we quickly evoked the book that had been gathering dust on a shelf for a long time. This brief encounter took place during the preparations for my stay in North America. Fortuitously, I had learned that the International Council for Canadian Studies (ICCS) funded ten scholarships each year for foreign doctoral students whose research focused on Canada. This opportunity allowed recipients to stay at a Canadian university for several weeks, facilitating their access to resources that would enrich their research. Several factors made me very cautious about hoping to be among the successful candidates. First, it was a competition open to a large number of countries with which the ICCS had relationships. Secondly, I felt that my profile as a student nearing fifty was not working in my favour. Finally, my research only partially focused on Canada, no more and no less than on France, Jersey, Trinidad & Tobago and Venezuela. In other words, I undertook the preparation of this application without illusions as to its likely success but with the unwavering determination of someone who had nothing to lose in the venture. Finalising the application required contacting and securing an agreement with a host university. After initially considering Memorial University of St. John's in Newfoundland, the closest to Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, my choice ultimately and very wisely fell on Moncton, a French-language university in New Brunswick. The acceptance of my application was a pleasant surprise, a great satisfaction, and offered the prospect of financially secure fieldwork in Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon.

The Acadian revelation

Moncton, a city which existence I was previously barely aware of, proved to be a decisive choice. In addition to the quality of the welcome in the small geography department, the university housed the Centre d'Études Acadiennes (CEA), which proved to be a goldmine of information, documenting the role of Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon from a perspective different from that exclusively focused on the fishing industry. From my previous literature review, I was already familiar with the archipelago's and, more specifically, Miquelon's ties to the Acadians. Even though it only affected a relatively small number of people – in the order of a few tens of thousands – their dispersal beginning in the 1750s provided a particularly striking example of a population buffeted by geopolitical upheavals. As mentioned earlier, the Seven Years' War spelled the end for the French colonies of Île Saint-Jean and Îsle Royale.

In 1755, the episode known as *Le Grand Dérangement* ('the Great Upheaval') began and was an emblematic element of the Acadian ordeal. Seeking personal accounts to give concrete human dimensions to these events, I found what I was looking for in the fascinating documentation zealously preserved by Stephen White, another Anglophone researcher from Massachusetts, and and eminent specialist in Acadian genealogy. The fragments of life, gathered from the dryness of records composed of necessarily incomplete extracts from civil registry documents, are nonetheless sufficient to evoke a range of emotions, such as the exhilaration of reconstructing these journeys, or the compassion for the accumulation of displacements and premature mortality. The story of the Benoit/Terriot family deserves special mention and description in this regard, having been discussed in my thesis and subsequently being the subject of numerous presentations in English and French in various formats.

Augustin Benoit was born in Grand Pré (Nova Scotia) in 1740. This village in the Minas Basin area – situated around the isthmus separating the present-day New Brunswick and Nova Scotia – was at this time home for one the most prosperous settlements of French Acadians who chose to stay in Nova Scotia under the rule of England according to the terms of Treaty of Utrecht in 1713. Françoise Terriot was born the same or the following year probably in Cobequid, another village of the region. The turbulent history of the French Acadian in North America began to take a disastrous turn in the late 1740s. As their situation was deteriorating, some of those who were established in Nova Scotia decided to move toward the only territories still controlled by France in the region i.e., Isle Royale and Île Saint-Jean. The Terriot and Benoit families were among them. Although they escaped the violent episode of the Great Upheaval of 1755, they were trapped in 1758 during the British capture of Louisbourg and the rest of French Acadia. After a nightmarish Atlantic crossing, which resulted in the deaths at sea or upon arrival in France of four of the seven members of the Terriot family and three of the five of the Benoit family (Wikitree, nd), the survivors found themselves eking out a living in the Saint-Malo region. It was there that Augustin and Françoise married in 1760 and had their first child the following year. Their lives then took an epic turn with French explorer Louis Antoine de Bougainville's short-lived project to colonise the distant Sebald (now known as Falkland) Islands in the name of the King of France. Two Acadian families, including these, embarked in 1763 for a supposedly one-way trip to islands off the coast of Patagonia (Pernety, 1769). But this initiative soon displeased the Spanish, and the colonists were repatriated in 1767. After a journey of about one year, Augustin and Françoise, now parents of four children, found themselves back in the Saint-Malo region. A few years later, their enduring desire to return to live closer to their now inaccessible homeland was fulfilled, despite the reluctance of French authorities to encourage the development of Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon. The parents and five children were registered in Saint-Pierre in 1772 and 1776 before being sent back to France in 1778. This transatlantic back-and-forth did not end there for the parents, and later for the children, as evidence attests to their involvement in the two subsequent deportations[3]. My research at the CEA has also allowed me to identify life paths where birth in Granville, expatriation to Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon and marriage to Acadian women were sometimes combined.

[3] Apart from Pernety's account of the voyage to the Falkland and a few allusions from Bougainville's memoirs, the biographical details described here have been gathered from various sources (censuses, genealogical websites) cross-referenced with the utmost care. To date the best compilation in English on the life of the Benoit/Terriot family is https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Benoit-210 (accessed 29th April 2026).

My stay in Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon and what I learned there

The course of this fascinating quest through the CEA's archives was interrupted by the long-awaited journey to the archipelago, where I landed in February 2002 on a typical winter day in these regions: cold with an icy wind and persistent snow. This harsh climate is not, as many people imagine, due to its high latitude, since Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon is only slightly further north than Bordeaux. The explanation lies in the systemic high pressure pattern that draws polar air down towards the eastern regions of the continental landmasses of the Northern Hemisphere. As a comparison, the Newfoundland region exhibits similar characteristics to Hokkaido in Japan, which is roughly at both the same latitude and position to the east of a continent: marked by significant snowfalls, subarctic vegetation and the presence of drift ice offshore in spring.

I had finally arrived in this small French archipelago of 242 km², with approximately 6,000 inhabitants, located off the Burin peninsula, south of Newfoundland, whose high, snow-covered cliffs were a prominent feature of the winter seascape. The majority of the inhabitants, some 5,400 people, live on Saint-Pierre, the smaller (25 km²) of the two inhabited islands. The rest of the population resides on Miquelon-Langlade (202 km²). Another smaller island, Île aux Marins,[4] which once had a population around 600, gradually became depopulated after the 1950s. Upon my arrival at the docks of Saint-Pierre, located some 700 metres from the town, I was immediately struck by the sight of its colourful houses and abandoned church. Besides the paradoxical beauty of its destitution, this vision of the fallen islet inevitably reminded me of its inhabitants who had settled there since the mid-19th century. Mostly from the Granville region, they were nicknamed *pieds rouges* ('red feet') by their close neighbors from Saint-Pierre in reference to their habit of standing and fishing in the cold water, which caused their feet to turn red from being so cold.

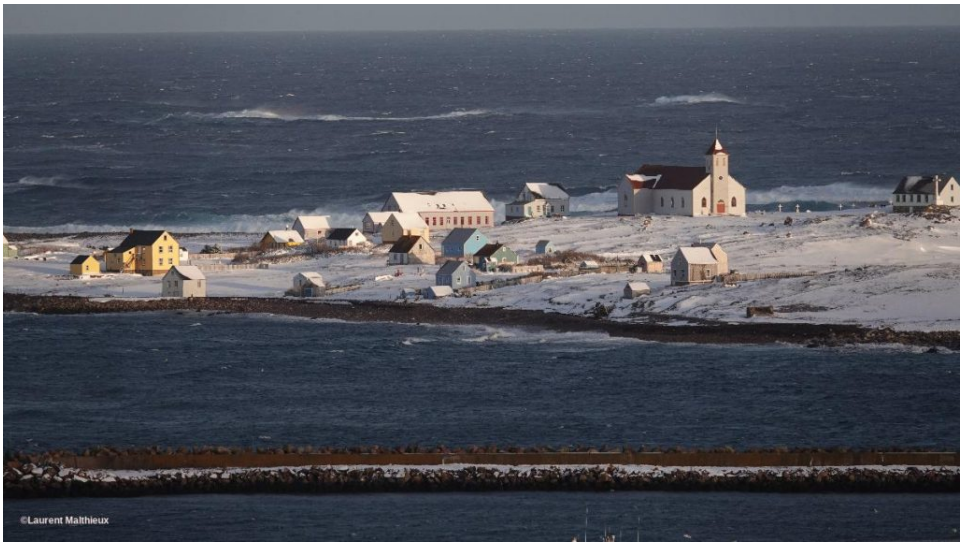

Figure 3 – L'île aux Marins. At the forefront, one of the protective jetties of Saint-Pierre harbour (photo Laurent Malthieux, c.2022).

[4] Its original name – L'île aux chiens ('The dog island') – was changed in 1931.

Time was short. Most of the ten days spent in the archipelago were devoted to conducting some thirty scheduled interviews, covering a wide range of issues. This research marathon could not have been so productive without the help of the staff at L'Agence de Développement de l'Archipe ('The Aquapelago Development Agency'), who enabled me to optimise my precious time. And my schedule could have been even busier if I had been able to go to Miquelon as planned, but adverse weather conditions had prevented the plane from taking off. Furthermore, a visit to Île aux Marins was not possible during the winter months, or a visit to Fortune on the neighboring Burin peninsula on Newfoundland. Two personally significant events marked my stay in Saint-Pierre. The first was a conference held at the cultural center on the thorny issue of the archipelago's delicate situation. It was an excellent opportunity to contrast the perspective of an outside observer conducting a territorial analysis with that of an audience that was, to say the least, highly informed about the topic given their daily experience of the challenges related to their place of residence. The second was more anecdotal, although it did allow me to reach a much larger audience, as I was invited to explain the reason for my presence on the evening news, a key slot on local television. There was no need to over-interpret the invitation, since it was a common occurrence for most visitors who had some reason other than strictly touristic for coming to the archipelago. Ultimately, the only break from the frenetic pace of the interviews was a Sunday snowshoe hike in the hills above Saint-Pierre. This invigorating excursion was a great opportunity to discover the island's Arctic-alpine tundra eco-system (Figure 4) and to experience an element so unfamiliar both to me as a traveler and in the biogeographical nomenclature of French territories.



Figure 4 – Sunday afternoon in the heights of Saint-Pierre on 3rd February 2002 and, in the background, Langlade island. (Photo by Emmanuel Lemallier.)

The main themes of the interviews focused on economic transformations, relations with Canada, the sharing of maritime spaces and identity. I arrived in a territory still reeling from the events of the previous decade, which had plunged it into an economic and, even, existential, crisis. The population was going through a period of uncertainty, marked by conflicting feelings and aspirations. Relations with Canada were particularly ambivalent. Essential for supplies and urban services, notably healthcare provided at St. John's, the neighbouring country was, by contrast, inflexible regarding territorial boundaries and access to fishing resources. Recurring grievances were also leveled against a metropolis accused of lacking political will on major issues. It is worth noting, however, that unlike neighbouring fishing communities in southern Newfoundland, which had suffered the same collapse of the fishing industry, the French archipelago had not been left to its fate. The atypical employment structure, based on a particularly high number of public servants for such a small territory – approximately 800 jobs for a total of 6,000 inhabitants – contributed significantly to maintaining a relatively satisfactory standard of living.

This was also the era of grand projects intended to put the archipelago back on the map of major commercial and entrepreneurial networks. The hope of exploiting offshore hydrocarbon deposits, whose presence had been suspected by previous explorations, was already fading, as the need to reach an agreement with Canada in the tense context of maritime disputes made this prospect highly improbable. Furthermore, the idea of making Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon a gateway to the European Union for Canadian products had been implemented for a time before being rejected by EU authorities. Later, the possibility of the port of Saint-Pierre becoming a transshipment hub for container ships bound for North America sparked some hope before joining other projects in the graveyard of lost economic dreams.

From my outsider's perspective, two factors prevented me from adopting an overly negative view of the situation in Saint-Pierre and Miquelon. The first concerned the implementation from 1996 of an institutional regional cooperation between the French territory and Atlantic Canada under the auspices of the French and Canadian governments. This initiative aimed to create opportunities for a territory traumatised by the fishing collapse, particularly in the cultural, economic, tourism and training sectors. The second factor was related to my own research at the Centre for Acadian Studies. The interviews, in which the question of Acadian identity was addressed, either partially or primarily, were among the most enlightening. In Saint-Pierre and Miquelon there was a particular interest in reactivating historical ties between the different branches of a dispersed people. The archipelago, as we have seen, served as a refuge for a significant number of Acadians expelled from Canada and caught up in the great transatlantic migrations of the second half of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries. Their descendants were keen to strengthen the ties that the Moncton-based Société Nationale Acadienne maintained through its relationships with affiliated organisations, one of which, created the year before my visit, was called Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon/Acadie. The practice of commemorations was an important element of this strategy for building closer ties. For its proponents, these events were intended to serve as catalysts for educational, cultural and, ultimately, economic cooperation. This was precisely the view of my interlocutors who were already preparing two important commemorations: the 400th anniversary of the first Acadian settlement in North America in 1604 and the 250th anniversary of the *Grand Dérangement* in the following year. I thereby returned from a particularly fruitful research trip, my luggage filled with books on Acadia and a multitude of impressions, sensations, data and testimonies about the archipelago that I had to organise and integrate into the general structure of my thesis.

The 1989 purchase: a story-in-progress

The next four years rushed by, dominated by family life, professional activity, preparation and execution of my research stay in Trinidad, regular attendance at the Joint Management Committee of the Bay of Granville – a body for managing the cross-border fishing relations between Jersey and France that I had become involved with – and, above all ,the writing of a 624 page document in support for a thesis defence that took place on October 6th, 2006. A week earlier, I had been invited to the International Geography Festival, held annually in Saint-Dié-des-Vosges,[5] in eastern France, to present a lecture entitled 'Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, îles frontière.' The theme that year, conveniently enough, was 'Geographers Rediscover the Americas,' and the invited 'countries' were the French Territories of the Americas. I had therefore felt it was a great opportunity to test my ability to present my reflections on one of the cases studied in my thesis shortly before the fateful day of my defence. Besides the interest of participating oneself, this kind of event is generally an opportunity to attend stimulating presentations, to make interesting encounters or even to experience the pleasure of more or less unexpected reunions. This was certainly the case that year in Saint-Dié. The day before my own conference, I had planned to attend a presentation by Claude Hagège, an internationally renowned linguist. Upon arriving at the entrance to the amphitheatre, I came face to face with someone whose Basque beret I immediately recognised: the very same one he had worn five years earlier, during our first meeting in Caen. It was Dean Louder, whom I greeted with a "Bonjour, Monsieur Louder!" and who immediately replied, "Bonjour, Monsieur Fleury!" This reunion was spontaneous and warm, surprising and, I must say, gratifying, given the brevity of our first meeting and the time that had passed since.

The day after my conference, I took a train to Nancy, to spend three hours in a city that I was unfamiliar with. Boarding a return train to Paris in the early afternoon I made my way to my reserved seat. There were no TGV fast trains on this line yet, and the train was rather old, made up of carriages composed of six-seat compartments. The chances of my sitting next to someone I knew in a train carrying several hundred people were extremely slim. Yet, as I sat down, Dean Louder was positioned directly opposite me! Chance had given us the opportunity to go beyond exchanging pleasantries, and the three hours separating us from Paris were one of those moments when you broaden your horizons without necessarily being fully aware of it at the time. What followed was a free-flowing conversation, a mix of my current projects, Dean's transcontinental travels in his Volkswagen van as he crisscrossed America in search of any trace of French settlements, and our shared love of Jack Kerouac.

As the conversation progressed, I decided to mention an anomaly I had noticed on the very interesting map presented at the beginning of his book. It showed the Francophone population outside Quebec for the years 1970-1971. This document, compiled from data from the official census agencies of Canada and the United States, was revealing. We could see circles of varying sizes scattered all over the place, even in unexpected locations in the United States. One detail was particularly important to me, and I wanted to share it with Dean: Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, the only territory of the French Republic in North America, was missing! When I pointed this out to Dean, specifying that the proof was available in my library, he looked at me with a mixture of amusement and scepticism. Our conversation

[5] The first mention of the word "America" in homage to Amerigo Vespucci was in 1507 in Saint-Dié-des-Vosges on a map created under the direction of the monk-cartographer Martin Waldseemüller. At the end of the 1990s, the city's mayor, then minister, decided to organise an annual international festival of geography which has since enjoyed great renown.

having taken a decidedly friendly turn, I suggested, after inquiring about his plans for the remainder of his stay in France, that he spend some time with my family, since he had commitments in Caen – forty minutes' drive from home – and free time afterward. Ten days later, Dean was at our house, and he had no choice but to face the facts: Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon had indeed been overlooked. It was late 2006, and preparations were well underway for the 400th anniversary of the founding of Quebec City in 1608. A new book, to be released as part of the numerous planned festivities and featuring many of the authors from the first one in 1983, was in the works. Dean then presented me with a challenge: I was to convince him and his co-editor, Eric Waddell, to include Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon in the forthcoming publication through a written statement of intent. This was promptly done and quickly accepted. The deadlines were short and a particularly stimulating meeting was on the horizon: the selected authors were to meet in April to compare their texts in a setting that had all the hallmarks of a dream retreat for a European sometimes steeped to the point of naivety in the stereotypes of the American outdoors: a collection of chalets appropriately named Northern Outdoors in the heart of the still snow-covered Appalachians, in The Forks, Maine, three hours south of Quebec City. This episode proved particularly fruitful. Writing the chapter 'Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, entre américanité et francité'[6] (Fleury, 2008) was an interesting exercise in synthesising the cultural, economic, and geopolitical issues concerning the archipelago. During the long drive back from Maine to Montreal, I was also invited by Jean Lamare, a history professor at the Royal Military College of Canada in Kingston (Ontario), to present a paper at the symposium organised by the College in Quebec City in November 2008. Finally, and no less importantly, it marked the beginning of a long friendship punctuated by reciprocal visits with Dean and Eric.



Figure 5 – A subtle French sign (the concrete electric pole – left of image) in the North American urban landscape of Saint-Pierre (Photo Christian Fleury)

[6] Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, Between American and French Identities.

Other encounters and beginning of other stories

Even though the complex issues surrounding the sharing of the sea and fishing grounds around the Channel Islands constituted a significant portion of the fieldwork I continued to conduct, my bond with Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, which remained a focal point that I never lost sight of despite several aborted research projects, was not broken and would continue to have unexpected consequences. The postdoctoral period is conducive to seizing opportunities. I was therefore open to anything that would allow me to validate the results of a period of my life devoted to these islands. The opportunity to broaden my academic horizons presented itself in the form of information about a conference organised in April 2008 in Sydney (Australia) by Philip Hayward, entitled 'From Marginality to Resurgence: European Islands and Regional Cultures in the Late 20th and Early 21st Centuries'. I made a proposal, soon accepted, comparing Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon and Jersey according to these two themes. Jersey is in Europe but was not in the European Union. Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon is an Overseas Country and Territory of the European Union, that is to say, a territory of a member state, but formally outside the European Union. In both cases, institutional marginality was evident. As for the cultural resurgence, specifically Acadian culture, it had been the subject of significant developments discussed above. Regarding Jersey, I had taken a close interest in the phenomenon of the revitalisation of Norman identity, which symbolically compensated for an anglicisation accelerated by the development strategy of the financial industry. As I lacked institutional financial resources, my attendance was, however, conditional on seeking for funding for this far trip. The good news arrived after a somewhat convoluted process with the French Embassy in Canberra. The provoked chance, several examples of which have already been encountered throughout this text, took on a new form in Sydney. Henry Johnson, professor of ethnomusicology at the University of Otago in New Zealand, a native of Jersey, 50 kilometers from my own birthplace, was speaking in the same session as me. Against all expectations, we each projected a slide displaying the same welcome and farewell messages in Jèrriais,[7] the Jersey local language, for visitors arriving on or leaving the island, whether at the ferry terminal or the airport. From this starting point, and despite our very different disciplinary backgrounds, we found enough common ground to collaborate on several joint publications, either in English or French (including Fleury and Johnson, 2013, 2024).

I then embarked wholeheartedly on a fruitful collaboration with Anglophone colleagues including members of the Small Island Cultures Research Initiative (SICRI) network. Besides revealing to me that I had somehow survived the outdated way I learned English during my distant high school years, my visit in Australia marked a turning point due to my increasingly regular participation in the network's annual conferences and the connections forged on these occasions. Hayward's 2012 article proposing the concept of aquapelago, which in short encompasses both terrestrial and marine elements as a whole in the same territorial vision, arrived at just the right moment for me. My affiliated institute at the University of Caen was a major centre in the emergence of social geography in France (Frémont et al., 1984). Initially focusing on rural areas and then on cities and their peripheries, it primarily considers space as a dimension of social relations, a key for reading them at different levels, from the individual to states, through the various and numerous forms of socialisation within established groups. My academic background and my affinity for social geography led me to integrate the sea into this system of thought. In my research, I had observed the significant

[7] Respectively *Séyiz les binv'nus à Jérri* (Welcome to Jersey) and *À bètôt et à la préchaine* (See you soon, until next time).

gap between, on the one hand, the diversity and importance of marine issues – particularly those surrounding islands and/or tangent of a boundary – and, on the other hand, the often incomplete perceptions and representations of the sea, whether these representations are graphic and mostly blue monochrome, or purely mental, with the widespread impression that not much happens there. Hayward's article prompted me to reconsider my view of the sea as a social space, within the framework of an even more integrative conception of the sea-land assemblage, a position whose relevance I then tested in light of my own research areas (Fleury, 2013). The situation in the Channel Islands, which I have been particularly involved in, constitutes in many respects a case study fitting well with the aquapelagic framework due to factors highly conducive to such a demonstration, notably the importance of the tidal phenomenon whose incessant ebb and flow continually transforms the landscape and impacts marine movements, as well as the intensity of local conflicts regarding the sharing of fishing zones. In a much more conflicting context, the situation around Trinidad and Tobago shows similarities, if not in its effectiveness, then at least in its normative framework, but with the exploitation of significant hydrocarbon deposits being the main determining factor in the agreements (Fleury, 2015).

The case of Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon was quite different, with a much smaller population affected but a strong symbolic dimension. As we have seen, the disagreement over the terms of sharing the sea around the archipelago resulted in an arbitration decision perceived as highly unfavorable by its inhabitants. In addition to the EEZ extension granted to Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon being far less than France's claims, its shape, described as the *tuyau* (pipe) by the locals and more pleasantly as the 'French baguette' in Newfoundland, fueled public anger, as it was deemed unsustainable from an economic standpoint. On the walls of almost every office where I held interviews, the map of the 1992 decision seemed a persistent reminder of the collective humiliation suffered. Resentment toward Canada found even more expression four years later when it unilaterally decided to extend its EEZ, using Sable Island as its reference point rather than the coast of Nova Scotia, which had the effect of completely encircling the French EEZ (Figure 2). This unusual situation intensified grievances against the neighbouring country and highlighted the validity of the sea as an integral part of the territory. There was, of course, no question of any kind of confinement, but beyond the fact that the Canadian power grab precluded any future possibility of extending the continental shelf, the map clearly carried significant symbolic weight by explicitly pointing to what was painful, namely the stark representation of an existential crisis due the fisheries collapse, a form of abandonment and the end of the colony's raison d'être (Fleury, 2013). The collective awareness of the sea as territory, or more precisely *maritory* (Needham, 2009), was all the more strengthened because it had been both drastically and explicitly reduced.

Conclusion

The encounters and collaborations with Anglo-Saxon colleagues detailed above allowed me to experience firsthand the relevance of their vision of Island Studies, which was far from the typological obsession that I sometimes encountered elsewhere. The networks I joined – as, effectively the only French researcher involved on a continuing basis – brought together academics from diverse disciplines, collectively made Island Studies a discipline in its own right, one which contributed by drawing on the inexhaustible pool of (small) islands to providing tools for understanding the world, like any other science. This quality has been and continues to be demonstrated in particular by the unique sensitivity of small islands to

global tensions, whether as lands of refuge, relegation, derogative spaces, nerve centers, or in a different field in relation with their vulnerability to climate change.

Miquelon offers a particularly illuminating illustration of the latter topic. The relocation process for this small village of 600 inhabitants built on a strip of sand and pebbles, extremely exposed to the onslaught of the sea and wind as well as to groundwater rise, has begun (Guibert, 2026). This project has inevitably provoked resistance. The abandonment of a place of life marked by the stubborn determination of previous generations to hold on a village in an environment subject to significant constraints and historical and economic challenges – which they ultimately always overcame – is difficult for some to bear. However, a change of course occurred following the double storm of November 2018, which damaged the port, flooded some forty houses and cut off roads. Five houses are today under construction 1,500 metres south of the village's current location, on a small hill, and applications are starting to pour in. This project, whose beneficiaries are on a voluntary basis, is financed by the French government and should eventually involve the entire population, comprising some 250 to 300 homes, and will make Miquelon the first French village to be relocated in the face of rising sea levels. As one of the people in charge of the case indicated (Radio France, 2026), each situation is unique and the solutions found here are not necessarily transferable. However, this case shows that small islands are often at an ideal scale for identifying, revealing, explaining, and sometimes resolving crucial problems. This is one of the many lessons to be learned from my long and ongoing engagement with Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon.



Figure 6 – The village of Miquelon (Photo Radio Canada / Patrick Butler).

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