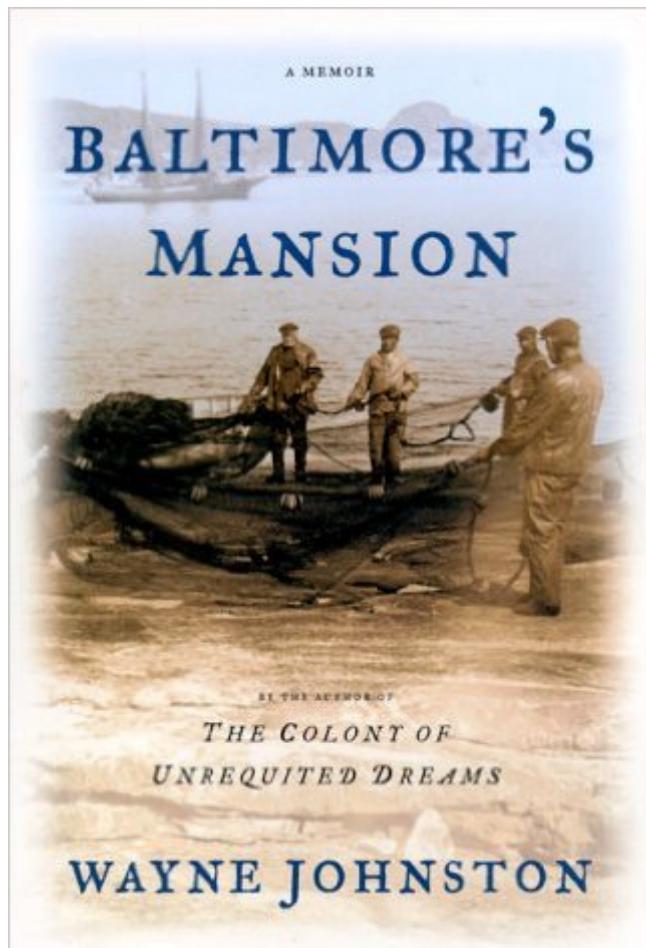


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Baltimore's Mansion



Synopsis

The acclaimed author of *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* introduces us to the Johnstons of Newfoundland in an intimate, captivating memoir of three generations of fathers and sons. The New York Times called Wayne Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* "an eventful, character-rich book...a brilliant and bravura literary performance." His marvelous new memoir, *Baltimore's Mansion*, is equally impressive, filled with heart-stopping descriptions, a cast of stubborn, acerbic, yet entirely irresistible family members, and an evocation of time and place reminiscent of his best fiction. Charlie Johnston is the famed blacksmith of Ferryland, a Catholic colony founded by Lord Baltimore in the 1620s on the Avalon Peninsula of Newfoundland. For his prowess at the forge, he is considered as necessary as a parish priest at local weddings. But he must spend the first cold hours of every workday fishing at sea with his sons, one of whom, the author's father, Arthur, vows that as an adult he will never look to the sea for his livelihood. In the heady months leading to the referendum that results in Newfoundland being "inducted" into Canada, Art leaves the island for college and an eventual career with Canadian Fisheries, studying and regulating a livelihood he and his father once pursued. He parts on mysterious terms with Charlie, who dies while he's away, and Art is plunged into a lifelong battle with the personal demons that haunted the end of their relationship. Years later, Wayne prepares to leave at the same age Art was when he said good-bye to Charlie, and old patterns threaten to repeat themselves. At times a harrowing tale of trails in the darkness, of grand desolation and dangerous coasts, *Baltimore's Mansion* speaks to us all about the hardships, blessings, and power of family relationships, of leaving home and returning.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a book about loss. About the loss of communication between generations. About the loss of a proud nation when its citizens, by the slimmest of margins, voted to be assimilated into Canada. And about the loss of opportunity to lay to rest family ghosts and unresolved questions. Unlike his novel "The Colony of Unrequited Dreams", Johnston's memoir is episodic and compartmentalized. The underlying theme is the anguish felt by so many Newfoundlanders when they were forced to choose in a referendum between remaining an independent country or casting in their lot with Canada. We experience that anguish through the relationships between generations. There is Johnston's grandfather, an outport blacksmith who carries a secret about the referendum to his grave. There is Johnston's father, a reluctant federal civil servant who rarely misses an opportunity to bemoan Newfoundland's merger with Canada and berate those who voted for it. And there is Johnston himself, who is so conflicted about his relationship with his father and grandfather, and with his native Newfoundland, that he can only write about it by leaving. "Baltimore's Mansion" is most successful in its marvelous vignettes: a nearly disastrous trip into the country to cut ice from a pond, a ride across the island on a much-loved but hopelessly inefficient passenger train about to be taken out of service by the Canadian government, the last enigmatic meeting on the beach between Johnston's father and grandfather, and Johnston's own confrontation with a howling winter storm on a remote island where he has retreated to come to terms with what he wants to write. Each is a short story unto itself and full of vividly descriptive writing.

While true the period of time of "remaining righteous" may be finite, it needn't be necessarily short. In the case of the Johnston Family the third of that generation deals with the consequences to this day. "Baltimore's Mansion" is both true Family History together with the autobiographical experience of the Author. He may not have witnessed all he memorializes, but the feeling you get while reading is that if there is a line between the two it is seamless. And that this is true is due to the Author's insight into the memories of others he experiences as opposed to the memories that are his own. The prose of this book is rich it is thick and dense. I intend that comment in only the most positive manner. There is nothing extraneous as you read, every sentence is important; this book is as long as it needs to be, no more or no less. I always had the impression the Author chose each word or phrase he wrote carefully and with purpose. The writing needs no embellishment it is precise and honest. The book is about change, about change that is often not wanted, about progress that is anything but, rather it is a series of events that strips away a people's identity, the ground their homes are built upon, the jobs they have known for generations, and ultimately the

Families themselves. The damage and dislocation that is suffered that is external is magnified by secrets and thought kept hidden for decades that if shared would have changed the lives of these Families. The book is about regret, missed opportunities, and an unwillingness to accept change that goes beyond simply sad to truly painful and destructive.

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