

# New Historical Texts

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*The Canadians* (series of individual histories). Fitzhenry and Whiteside. 1974-5. 62 pp. ea. \$2.25 paper.

Series of small junior books in soft covers have become fashionable in educational circles during recent years, a trend partially due to classroom emphasis upon individual reading, research and writing. Many of the series have been created specifically for the teaching of reading, but others now concern themselves with varied subject areas. A newcomer in the field of history is *The Canadians*, an expanding series of books, each book involving a sixty-four page biography of a personality contributing significantly to Canadian life.

On first perusal this new series reminded me of *The Canadian History Readers*, a massive series of slim, paper-backed books edited by the late Dr. Lorne Pierce and published by Ryerson Press during the 1920's and 30's. In light of current publishing and educational movements it is clear that Dr. Pierce's productions, now long out of print, were well ahead of their time insofar as objective and format were concerned.

The thirteen titles of *The Canadians* are now available under the following titles: *Alexander Graham Bell, Norman Bethune, Emily Carr, Timothy Eaton, Casimir Gzowski, Marion Hilliard, Allan Napier MacNab, Sam McLaughlin, William Hamilton Merritt, Egerton Ryerson, Laura Secord, Elizabeth Simcoe, and David Thompson*. A list of forty-nine forthcoming titles reveals a broad selection of other personages who as the publisher states, "come from a wide variety of social and economic backgrounds and from many different ethnic groups. They made their contributions in fields as diverse as politics, literature, science, war, medicine, sport, business, painting, technology, religion, transportation and education."

For a number of reasons I consider *The Canadians* a practical series for use in schools and libraries. It provides interesting and detailed information not normally found in junior history texts. Its small volumes, organized into an integrated series, are in keeping with current methodology. The fact, too, that the series is physically attractive enhances its general appeal. However, individual books are not totally free from imperfections in style, content and illustrative materials.

In beginning an assessment of the series, I recognize that a well balanced selection of subjects from the full range of Canadian historical

figures presented the editor with a formidable number of choices. Editorial difficulty, too, undoubtedly was compounded by the time span stretching all the way from the period of Cornelius Krieghoff to that of Marshall McLuhan. The criteria employed in the selection of titles are by no means clear. It seems that some titles were chosen on the basis of historical significance and others from the standpoint of human interest or novelty of contribution. The charming Mary Pickford is without question worthy of a biography, but should it be included in a series which by its own claim is concerned with "significant contributions to the history and culture of Canada?"

An overview of the entire listing of titles, available and forthcoming, indicates that Canadians directly or indirectly connected with political life occupy approximately one-third the places of honour provided by the series. These individuals are followed in second place by those who gave distinguished service in time of warfare or those who held leadership in time of rebellion. In third place are those who wrote books or created poetry.

Canadian women seem to have fared rather badly in terms of number, holding as they do a mere nine titles in a total of sixty-two. If women are neglected in their frequency of appearance, it may be said that male literary figures have suffered in the same manner. Grey Owl and Stephen Leacock are the only masculine representatives from the field of popular literature.

In view of the teen-aged readership for which the series was intended, it is also rather curious that more emphasis was not placed on heroic adventure and physical action as exemplified by the exploits of explorers, seamen, prospectors, geologists, and others. Magnificent explorations achieved by the men of New France have been disregarded. There is not a single name from among the British seamen who for so long fought the indomitable struggle for conquest of the North West Passage. Where are Champlain and LaSalle, Parry and Franklin? However, one book now available in the series, *David Thompson* by James Smith, does present the heroic adventure theme in an effective manner. It offers a lively and accurate account of geographic achievement and hazardous travel in an era when the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company were battling for supremacy in the western fur trade.

Judging by the six books submitted for review, it appears that the editor of the series has not imposed a restrictive writing formula on his authors. The books vary in style, vocabulary level, and complexity of subject content. One of the six authors takes a somewhat formal and academic approach to his subject while the others adopt a more informal, story-book manner complete with dialogue. There is a legitimate place for both types of treatment in the series.

In one respect the books are similar in that the authors all begin by directly projecting readers into the midst of a colourful scene. For example, Bassett and Petrie in *Allan Napier MacNab* initiate their story with the following paragraph:

The crash of splintering timbers brought young Allan

MacNab to his senses, and, without thinking, he backed away from the window. Already several buildings near the wharf were on fire. The cause was obvious: small white puffs of smoke appeared from time to time from the line of ships off the Scarborough Bluffs.

It is not a simple task for authors to entertain young readers and at the same time to impart serious historical knowledge much of which, to the teen-aged mind, is dry and unexciting. In spite of this difficulty, authors of *The Canadians* have succeeded in maintaining a lively style and in holding interest by interspersing stirring events with developments of a political, economic and social nature.

There is always the risk in a series of this kind that individual stories may be developed too narrowly as isolated units having little or no relationship to broad movements of their times. It is by focussing attention upon the chronology and the interrelationship of events that historical perspective is created. Authors of *The Canadians* have provided historical facts as background for their main characters, but some authors have been more successful than others in this respect. As well, some interesting background items noted in the series are as follows: (1) during the American War of Independence the French took advantage of the disturbed situation by attacking British ships and trading posts; (2) British forces occupied Fort Detroit for some time after the United States came into being; (3) Governor John Graves Simcoe promoted a bill forbidding slavery in Upper Canada; (4) the disease of cholera swept through the ranks of laborers engaged in construction of the Welland Canal; (5) in the year 1832 no less than 66,334 immigrants arrived in Canada; (6) Emily Carr's father established a wholesale business in California during the days of the famous Gold Rush.

The number and quality of pictorial illustrations are matters of particularly vital importance in junior books for educational use. Illustrations not only enhance the attractiveness of publications but also can complement information provided by textual content. *The Canadians* series is amply illustrated by a mixture of photographs and reproductions of paintings, drawings, posters and documents--some new, some old. These range in quality from fair to superb. Of particular interest are a poster concerning runaway slaves in *Laura Secord*, paintings of the Welland Canal in *William Hamilton Merritt*, old street scenes of Hamilton in *Allan Napier MacNab*, numerous paintings by the artist herself in *Emily Carr*, and the portrait of Governor Simcoe in *Elizabeth Simcoe*. While the drawings of Charles W. Jefferys are excellent, they have become overexposed through more than half a century of continuous usage in historical works.

Unfortunately, more attention might have been placed on the selection of cover illustrations. Of the six covers examined I rate two as poor, three as fair, and one as excellent. The book devoted to *Emily Carr* undoubtedly is the most satisfying from the viewpoint of overall artistic merit and visual effectiveness.

It is pleasing to note that maps have been included among the visual materials in all books, maps that are well designed and contain essential geographic information. Some of these, however, are too small in size and in consequence lead to difficulty in reading and

interpretation. A plea, therefore, is made for larger maps in forthcoming books.

Having made the above comments about illustration of *The Canadians*, I consider it only fair to add that publishers are currently hampered by high costs in the creation and/or acquisition of pictorial materials. Indeed, the establishment of acceptable selling prices for educational books often requires compromise in the matter of visual presentation. Under the circumstances, the art director of the series has done well in spite of limitations imposed by budget and market.

*The Canadians* has made a promising beginning in a publishing venture that offers both functional books in a time of educational complexity and suitably priced books in a time of exorbitant production costs.

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## Newfoundlandia

KRISTINE PENNEY

*Doryloads: Newfoundland Writings and Art*, ed. Kevin Major. Breakwater Books (Portugal Cove, Nfld.), 1974. 203 pp. \$4.95 paper.

**D***oryloads* is an anthology of works by Newfoundland writers, poets, and artists which has been edited by Kevin Major. Originally it began as a project for a Master's degree; however, once compiled, dressed up and printed, it was adopted into the English program at the grade seven and eight level.

Unfortunately, I found myself thinking that, were it not for the current vogue of incorporating "Newfoundlandia" into the curriculum of the province of Newfoundland (and Labrador), this book would have remained at the University on the desk of the board of examiners, or perhaps, it would have been published and read by adults--though not in great numbers.

Many of the selections are, quite frankly, rather tedious. Much of the historical material is interesting, but less experienced readers may have trouble with the archaic style. Considering that these stories are supposedly geared to twelve to fourteen-year-old readers, some selections were quite inappropriate. On the other hand, familiar names like Ray Guy, Ted Russell, Al Pittman, A. R. Scammell and Tom Moore appear frequently. These writers are consistently good and their material appeals to a broad range of age groups.