

McGillivray's Nor'Westers "explored and traded their way from the tiny canoe depot on the St. Lawrence to the Pacific, from whence the fabulous riches beckoned" (p. 220). However, the pressures of business never caused him to relinquish his familial responsibilities. Unlike some of his peers, McGillivray did not cast off his illegitimate Métis children as disinherited "bits of brown stuff" (p. 34). Instead he made provision for the education and financial well-being of his children born on either side of the blanket.

Both students and teachers of Canadian history have long lamented the fact that Canadian history lacks the American's long list of folk heroes. In his introduction to *The Firebrand* Kilbourn comments that the Laurentian shield and the Group of Seven are not substitutes "for a race of gods and heroes." However, the biographies written by Kilbourn, Graham and Campbell present fascinating stories which offer some respite from this Canadian dilemma.

*Debra Nash-Chambers was employed as an historical research assistant by the Canadian historical Atlas Commission while completing her M.A. study of mid-nineteenth century Canadian Social patterns and entrepreneurship. She has now returned to full-time graduate study to complete her doctorate.*

## They Built Canada: Historical Biography for Canadian Children

CARLA NEWBOULD

*We Built Canada*, Keith Wilson, series editor. Toronto: The Book Society of Canada, 1976-1981. 16 volumes with various authors. 44-84 pp. ISBN 0-7725-5285-5300-o/x.

Canadian biography suffers from neglect in the Canadian junior and senior high school curriculum. Seldom do our children learn about Canadian heroes, past or present. In this vast and diverse country students should be encouraged to realize they share common roots and common heroes. A nation, after all, is the sum of its people. In order to fill this gap, the Book Society of Canada began publication in 1976 of the "We Built Canada" series. The list is expanding. To date, it consists of sixteen books in English, three in French and five

translated into French. Keith Wilson, who wrote three of the volumes, is general editor. With extensive use, this series should stimulate a renewed excitement in Canadian biography in students at junior high school and the lower grades of senior high schools.

The subjects range from the nationally-known *Louis Riel and the New Nation* by Colin Davies, *The Mounties and Law Enforcement* by D. Bruce Sealey and *Donald Smith and the Canadian Pacific Railways* by Keith Wilson to the more regional *The Grey Nuns and the Red River Settlement* by Dennis King and *Vilhjalmur Stefansson and the Arctic* by Alexander George. Issues and personalities as diverse as *R.B. Russell and the Labour Movement* by Kenneth W. Osborne, *Cuthbert Grant and the Métis* by D. Bruce Sealey, *Letitia Hargrave and Life in the Fur Trade* by Donna C. Phillips and *Nellie McClung and Women's Rights* by Helen K. Wright are included in this series. The books, presented in soft covers, are of varying lengths, none more than 80 pages. Several of these have colourful reproductions of Canadian paintings bearing a relationship to the subject. The cover painting of *The Grey Nuns and the Red River Settlement* is strikingly poignant. The photograph on the cover of *Vilhjalmur Stefansson and the Arctic* gives a marvellous view of the vastness of the North. The least successful covers are those produced for this series, such as the cliché-rich cover of *Nellie McClung and Women's Rights*.

Well researched, the series includes effective excerpts from private letters and reminiscences. For example, the vivid description of the battle of Duck Lake in *Louis Riel and the New Nation* puts life into the historical account: "The congregation," wrote William Cameron, a survivor,

was kneeling and I knelt with the others. A moment later there came the rattle of musketry from the door and looking out from beneath my arm I saw Wandering Spirit enter. He moved cat-like on his moccasined feet to the centre of the church and dropped on his right knee there, his Winchester clutched in his right hand, the butt resting on the floor. His lynx-skin war-bonnet, from which depended five large eagle plumes, crowned his head; his eyes burned and his hideously-painted face was set in lines of deadly menace . . .

Or again, what visions are conjured up by Sister Lagrave, a Grey Nun en route to the Red River Settlement:

What can I say? I think the great gale over Lake Huron blows all my ideas away. I am sitting on a rock trying to collect a few.

Maps, photographs and reproductions of contemporary paintings

are integral to each book. Keith Wilson's *George Simpson and the Hudson's Bay Company* for example, is well and clearly illustrated with archival material from the Hudson's Bay Company. Life in Simpson's time comes alive from a close study of this material. The illustrations in *Vilhjalmur Stefansson and the Arctic* explain a great deal about that little-known part of Canada. The use of pictorial material is extensive. The Donald Smith volume has sixty-five illustrations in seventy-seven pages, the volume on Nellie McClung has seventy-two in seventy-two pages and that on the Mounties has sixty-seven illustrations in seventy-eight pages. The other volumes are similar.

That the series is designed for use in the classroom is evident from the abundance of teaching aids in the form of suggested crafts, projects, sight-seeing visits and audio-visual supplements. These suggestions, which are spaced throughout the text rather than added as an afterthought at the end of the volume, are extremely varied. For example, in Helen Wright's *Nellie McClung and Women's Rights* (history joined to contemporary issues!), students are asked to do a number of tasks concerning stereotyped sex roles, job opportunities for women, attitudes to women's work; to undertake map studies of various episodes in the story; to plan skits of a family moving West; to describe life as a teacher in Manitoba in the 1890's; and to bake a Scripture cake as Nellie did. The lists, which seem endless, will doubtless be used in something less than their entirety.

Barbara and Michael Angel's book about Letitia Hargrave is a very readable and delightful account of the life of one of the first European women to live at York Factory, the centre of the Hudson's Bay Company's Northern Department. This product of a Scottish young ladies' "finishing school" embarked on her voyage to the Rupert's Land outpost with a satin gown, calf-skin walking shoes, frilly bonnets, and "specially constructed German-made piano". After a trying journey of some three months, she nonetheless described with affection what must have been an inhospitable York Factory:

I was much surprised at the great swell the Factory is. It looks beautiful. The houses are painted pale yellow, the windows and some particular parts white. Some have green gauze mosquito curtains outside and altogether the effect is very good.

In 1840, courage was necessary to write those words.

Letitia's redoubtable nature makes the book interesting. Fascinating too, are the chapters describing family life at York

Factory. The trappers and workers must have lived in cold, vile conditions but Letitia, as wife of the head of York Factory, presided over the social highlight of each day – dinner at the Gentlemen’s Mess. A friend described Letitia on her death as “goodness and benevolence itself” and deserving the “respect, esteem and affection of everyone”. As the student should not fail to grasp after reading one or two of the volumes in this series, it is goodness, benevolence and esteem which are given the credit for building our nation.

Although written in a somewhat more clumsy style than *Letitia Hargrave and the Fur Trade*, Sealey’s *The Mounties and Law Enforcement* provides an historical context for the R.C.M.P. It is the bravery of the Mounties who were sent to the West to protect the Indians from the whiskey traders which the reader is encouraged to understand. Plagued by mosquitoes, lack of water and Indian ambush, the “Originals” provide lively and entertaining history for young students. The author makes it clear how closely the history of Western Canada is linked to the history of the Mounties. In this book, like the others, the range of student project suggestions is vast – from learning Indian dance steps to finding out about finger painting.

In his second book in the series, *Cuthbert Grant and the Métis*, Sealey has also written an account of Métis life in late eighteenth century Manitoba. A Métis himself, Grant founded the “New Nation” of Grantown so that his people could keep their separate identity. Grant’s relationship with the Scottish infiltrators and the more radical Riel and his problems of maintaining a traditional way of life, serve as a reminder to students that current problems can have historical antecedents. For a generation of students reared on the McLuhanesque ethos of “now”, it is refreshing to see this book, as indeed the whole series, treat the present as part of a continuing whole.

Like most of the books in this series, the story of Grant is not value-free. Grant was a doer, an individual whose perseverance and hard work were responsible for his achievement. In the final analysis, the thread common to the series is the stuff of heroes – the Protestant work ethic. The makers of Canada, exemplified by Sir John A. Macdonald (one of Keith Wilson’s subjects), Nellie McClung and Etienne Brûlé, were all achievers, with scarcely a failure among them. This series is a history of heroes – a history forged by great men and women rather than by movements or ideals. The more observant student might wonder how a nation built on “goodness, benevolence and esteem” reached the precarious state it now is in, but one can understand the editor’s intention to leave out the history of failure and

sloth. Adolescents are avid readers of biography. These volumes are lively and exciting – a good choice for making younger Canadians aware of the colourful variety of our nation's history.

*Carla Newbould of Lethbridge, Alberta, taught English for seven years in high schools in Canada, England and Holland. She is currently a member of the Lethbridge Public Library Board.*

## Old Tomorrow With Warts and Nose

TERRY CROWLEY

*John A. Macdonald, Peter B. Waite. "The Canadians". Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1976. 64 pp. paper. ISBN 0-88902-231-3.*

*The John A. Macdonald Album, Lena Newman. Tundra Books, 1974. 224 pp. \$14.95 paper. ISBN 0-912766-12-3.*

For nearly forty years Sir John A. Macdonald determined Canadian political life. He was not only the country's first Prime Minister after Confederation but also a clever politician, an adroit maneuverer, a quick wit, and a very human flawed individual. His ability to lead people was matched only by his ability to consume prodigious amounts of drink. Despite the personal tragedies that saddened his life from his earliest years, he managed to govern an ungovernable country and carry it into the industrial age.

Peter Waite's short study of Macdonald's life is one of eighty-eight brief biographies published by Fitzhenry and Whiteside in their admirable "The Canadians" series. Waite cannot resist being charmed by Macdonald any more than many of his contemporaries could, but he is too good an historian to hide the man's faults. In one amusing anecdote the author recounts how Macdonald, drunk at the Quebec Conference in 1864, was found rehearsing Hamlet before a mirror, dressed in nightshirt and railway blanket.

Waite's Macdonald is an exemplary family man but a politician with his warts showing. He is the type of person the author himself would have enjoyed as a friend: a man with a sound education, broad