

again, the presentation might only reinforce the idea that history is not all that interesting.

History can be fascinating. Publishers and authors must continue to explore ways of bringing it to life. Kids Can Press has achieved some success with *A Proper Acadian* (by Mary Alice Downie, 1980) and *The Tin-Lined Trunk* (by Mary Hamilton, 1980). Let us hope that Dundurn Press will be more successful in its future attempts. Until that time, Frontiers and Pioneers series offers an attractive, accurate, but not a stimulating introduction to some little known aspects of our history.

*Mickie McClear is the Head of Children's Services for the Midwestern Regional Library System in Kitchener, Ontario.*

## One of the Family

*KATHLEEN GRANT JAEGER*

*The Tin-Lined Trunk*, Mary Hamilton. Illus. by Ron Berg. Kids Can Press, 1980. 64 pp. \$2.95 paper. ISBN 0-919964-28-1 (English edition). ISBN 0-919964-32-X (French edition).

*Gaskill's Cove: A Novel of Early Nova Scotia*, Robert B. Powell. Book design by Mary Eliza Franklin. Petheric Press, 1975. 173 pp. \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-919380-19-3.

The second title to appear in Kids Can Press's *Kids Canada* series, *The Tin-Lined Trunk* draws its background from the British Child Emigration Scheme that sent homeless children to work as indentured servants in the British Colonies between 1865 and 1925. Over 80,000 such children settled in Canada, and Mary Hamilton devises a typical pair, Polly Dipple and her older brother Jack, a pair of London street waifs sent to Ontario under the auspices of Dr. Barnardo's Homes. Her story tells of the eighteen months between the children's "rescue" and their being accepted by the Canadian Mr. and Mrs. Sommers as no longer "Home children," but "more like family, you know" as Mr. Sommers puts it on the novella's last page.

The lively opening finds Polly and Jack living hand-to-mouth in the Spitalfields Market area in London, homeless, hungry and cold, with the constant threat of the workhouse hanging over them. Polly sells matches to buy nightly shelter in a doss-house, while Jack gets what casual labour he can, and "sleeps rough" in the Market. All they have is their affection for one another, and dim memories of gentler times, symbolised by the lace collar on Polly's bedraggled frock, the work of their mother, dead for four years.

One night, having blown their earnings on hot puddings, ginger beer and fun at the play, both are reduced to sleeping out, and it is then that they are found by Dr. Barnardo, betrayed in their hiding place by the ailing Polly's cough. Being saved from hunger and cold also means being saved from running their own lives, for Polly is shipped off to a cottage colony in Ilford to get strong and be trained for domestic service, while Jack is put to a trade at the Home's training establishment for boys. Mary Hamilton skims over this period at a brisk pace: Polly settles down, learns to read and becomes skilled in housework at eleven years of age; Jack, on the other hand, finds the restrictions of indoor work irksome. The solution is to head for Canada for farm work under the Home scheme that saw such boys work as servants for twenty pounds a year, deposited for them in trust with the Barnardo foundation.

More than half of *The Tin-Lined Trunk* is devoted to Polly's adjustment to life with the Sommers on their farm near Stratford. Well-trained for her domestic tasks, she has yet to contend with such country terrors as cows, and the short temper of Mrs. Sommers, who sees the under-sized Polly as a poor substitute for "our Maggie," the now-married daughter whose place she is to fill. The Sommers are decent folk, however, and Polly is well-treated. Jack is less fortunate at a near-by farm, and runs away, to be reunited with Polly only near the end of the story, when he becomes a part of the Sommers' household.

The constraints that the brief format of the Kids Canada series has placed on the author are apparent at every turn in *The Tin-Lined Trunk*. The stories of Polly and Jack might each have made a full-length novel exploring great themes in children's literature: the displaced child and the search for identity. Mary Hamilton has wisely decided to restrict her tale essentially to Polly's adventure, but even so, to show what happens to a girl taken from the world of *Oliver Twist* to that of *Anne Shirley* in 64 pages is a thankless task. The author has no scope to deal with the child heroine as more than a bit of social history, and so the kinds of exploration of the themes that lie under such a childish experience that we find in Boston's *Stranger at*

*Green Knowe*, Burnett's *The Secret Garden* or Garfield's *Smith* are closed to her.

The *Kids Canada* series is designed, its publishers say, to make "events from Canadian history come to life" for children in Grades 4-6. In the hands of a skilful teacher, the work should stimulate youngsters' imagination as they are helped to fill out the details of Polly and Jack's story: just what being sent to the workhouse meant; the conditions suffered on the voyage across the Atlantic; the work Jack would meet on the farm, and so on. Much is left to be filled in, and Ron Berg's evocative illustrations help to flesh out the bare bones of the story by their emotional impact. This is especially true of the London series. The Canadian ones are bland, and the frontispiece map will inspire no one. The cover design is excellent. Polly stands alone with her trunk, the Union Jack looming behind her to guarantee her status as one of the deserving poor.

The values that Dr. Barnardo subscribed to and that make Polly accepted as a member of the Sommers family, courage, honesty, hard work and the fear of the Lord are exemplified in another attempt to present an aspect of Canada's heritage, the shipbuilding communities of nineteenth century Nova Scotia. Robert B. Powell's *Gaskill's Cove* was designed as "a tribute to those hard-working people . . . by whose efforts Nova Scotia attained a period of world renown and prosperity."

A chronicle of four generations of Gaskills, *Gaskill's Cove* is narrated by a grandson of Wilfred Rogers. Like the Dipple children, Wilfred has sought a new life in Canada, but has become one of the family of Gaskill in a thoroughly fairy-tale way. A fugitive first from his apprenticeship in a Liverpool warehouse and then from life as a merchant seaman, Wilfred has jumped ship in St. John, made his way across the Bay of Fundy, and encountered Parson Turner, a New Light Baptist. Parson Turner sees this unlikely hero as a God-sent replacement for the lost son of Captain Gaskill, and delivers him to Gaskill's Cove, where, after a brief period of testing, he becomes the husband of Captain Gaskill's daughter. In doing so, he becomes part of the growing enterprise that is Gaskill's Cove in 1800.

*Gaskill's Cove* tells the story not so much of a family, but of the building of a wilderness settlement into a shipbuilding, lumber-mill, grist-mill community, with the original cabin replaced by an elaborate family house, tenant workers housed near-by, a company store, and a New Light Baptist Church built and maintained by the Gaskill interest. Begun at Captain Gaskill's arrival with his family as United Empire Loyalists in 1776, the world that is Gaskill's Cove draws its

strengths from hard work, enterprise, and loyalty to family and friends. In the course of four generations there are defections: one of Wilfred's sons marries the Acadian daughter of one of the Gaskill's ship captains, and settles in New Orleans. Apart from this, the Gaskill clan remains a cohesive unit, organised around its founder, Captain Gaskill.

Robert B. Powell, who died some three years ago, is a product himself of the kind of background he has depicted in his novel. Born in Westport, Digby County, he was MLA for Digby for seven years, and active in local historical societies. *Gaskill's Cove* is an attempt to preserve a part of his heritage.

Any adolescent reading the novel will find much in the dynamics of family life amongst the Gaskills to respond to. The descriptions of day-to-day life and in particular of tools and methods of ship-building are deft and absorbing, and the non-Nova Scotian will learn something of the almost feudal feeling of these early family settlements. The ending is wry, and reflects the persistently non-sentimental attitude of the author. Captain Gaskill dies, and his will leaves both the possible profits and the inevitable responsibilities of the Gaskill enterprises to the sole stewardship of his most promising grandchild. The result is bad feeling that we know will persist for at least the next four generations at Gaskill's Cove.

Petheric Press publishes the *Nova Scotia Historical Quarterly* and has specialised in books about Nova Scotia's heritage. Physically, *Gaskill's Cove* is extremely pleasant, with fine paper, generous margins, and charming line-drawings of artifacts as chapter headings, and silhouette marine motifs as tail-pieces, that add to the over-all quality of the work.

*Kathleen Grant Jaeger has taught English at the University of British Columbia, Acadia University and Mount Saint Vincent University. At present she is a doctoral student at Dalhousie University, and teaching part-time in the English Department there.*