

The Memory Book. Anne Spencer. Illus. Malcolm Cullen. Key Porter Kids, 1995. Unpag. \$19.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55013-711-5. **Eleanora's Diary: The Journals of a Canadian Pioneer Girl.** Caroline Parry. Scholastic, 1994. 219 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-590-74096-2.

When two authors produce books which (a) give intimate accounts of Canadian history (b) do so through an accessible diary format, and (c) have girls as their central characters, it seems downright mean-spirited to suggest (d) that neither effort actually produced a good read. Unfortunately, the authors of both *The Memory Book* and *Eleanora's Diary* seem to have become so deeply involved with their subjects that they lost their perspective, and ultimately produced books that will confuse or simply bore all but the most precocious and committed young readers.

Anne Spencer's *The Memory Book* is a beautifully laid out and illustrated set of excerpts from fictional diaries. The entries are intended to reflect the lives of the narrator's mother, Sheila, and grandmother, Grace, as girls in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia.

Oddly, for a book that purports to celebrate place, Lunenburg itself is never identified, which would have given the stories of life by the sea a more authentic feel. A young reader will also be confused by unfamiliar terms. One of Grace's entries expresses her wish to stow away on her father's boat, perhaps to become a "throater," which she dreams about while packing his "nippers."

Young readers know how much their world changes as they age, and how different they are from their parents. As a result, they simply will not accept Grace writing in exactly the same voice in her last entries, at twelve years old, as she did in her first, at ten. The same style colours the entries by Sheila over the same age span, more than 30 years later. If we could see the two girls change and mature, or at least detect distinct differences between the two, *The Memory Book* would be more believable, engaging, and, as a result, a better read.

If *The Memory Book* foundered on the author's love for a place and a way of life, *Eleanora's Diary* positively sinks under its author's enthusiasm for history. Caroline Parry started with the rich material in the real-life diaries of Eleanora Hallen, an English girl whose family emigrated to central Ontario in 1835, but appears to have forgotten how to make the material interesting.

Much of *Eleanora's Diary* is devoted to journal entries and drawings by our heroine. Along the way, Parry attempts to establish context by including accounts from other family members' diaries, maps, newspaper clippings and other illustrations. The effect is overwhelmingly cluttered, bogging down the central story in minutiae.

Parry's decision to maintain Eleanora's original spelling and grammar makes for tough slogging, as does the inclusion of material which adds nothing to the story of her move. The resulting entries are virtually impenetrable: "We turned

our bonnets. Mary took the fur of one of the mantilas that Miss Randall had put on very sillilly and put itt on double.”

Parry or her editor should have stepped back from their noble effort long enough to realize they were losing perspective. Someone should have cut back to the most relevant details of Eleanora’s life, made the commentary less cumbersome and ridden with exclamation marks, thereby producing a less confusing and more effective book.

Still more effective would have been a fictionalized treatment of Eleanora’s invaluable diaries. Such an approach could have maintained the central story, but in a way that would have been easier to read, and more likely to achieve the goal of interesting young people in Canadian history through Eleanora’s story. Relevant accompanying material could have been added as appendices.

It is heartening to see Canadian authors attempting to make history intimate and interesting to today’s young readers. In future, perhaps they will also remember to treat that history as a good story.

Nancy Payne is a writer and broadcaster who lives near Winchester, Ontario. She has a special interest in children’s literature.

CAROLINE’S DIARY

Eleanora’s Diary: The Journals of a Canadian Pioneer Girl. Caroline Parry. Scholastic Canada Ltd., 1994. 219 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-590-74096-2.

I had seen Caroline Parry lecture and perform before I read one of her books, so I was not surprised at the rich complexity of *Eleanora’s Diary*. Parry introduces, edits, and annotates the previously unpublished diary of Eleanora Hallen (1823-1846), one of eleven children of a poor curate from the Midlands district of England. She highlights one year of the diary. This is 1835: the year that Eleanora and her family travelled to their new wilderness home in Simcoe County, Ontario. Parry illustrates the diary with contemporary photographs and old drawings, paintings, and advertisements. Added to the sparse original text, this massive amount of detail helps evoke the time and places about which Eleanora wrote. In presenting these details, Parry plays at least three roles, and somehow out of the complexity comes a celebration.

In her role as a teacher, Parry instructs with many probing questions and a few pithy lessons. Always Parry is wondering about the “little unknowns” of which Eleanora’s journals are “full.” Why did Eleanora start her diary on April 1, 1833? Why did her family emigrate? What was her first Christmas in Canada really like? Now and then, Parry offers a pedagogically firm conclusion: “As much as we can assemble the pieces and try to make a good picture of times gone by, we can never be sure we have recreated the past absolutely accurately.”

In her role as an entertainer, Parry paces the text to the short attention spans of young people, offering a brief diary excerpt, then an aside, then an artifact. For