

dissection of the behind-the-scenes politicking that led to the school's establishment.

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Richard Aldrich, ed. *Public or Private Education? Lessons from History*. London: Woburn Press, 2004. Pp. 256.

This heterogeneous collection is part of the long-running Woburn Education Series. *Public or Private Education* consists of ten items on vastly different aspects of history. In just over two hundred pages the reader encounters an article on the inclusion of women within the British educational system, another piece devoted to the establishment of comprehensive high schools in Australia, and even one on the varied life experiences of George Aldrich, telecommunications engineer and father of Richard, Emeritus Professor of History of Education at the University of London, and the editor of this particular volume. About two-thirds of the book is devoted to the British experience, with a last section discussing aspects of U.S., Australian, and international education. While the dust-jacket trumpets that “key themes and turning points” in education are examined within, and predicts the volume will naturally become “required reading,” the book does not quite live up to that billing. Certainly readers who steadfastly demand balance or thematic continuity will be disappointed, since there really isn't one central issue that is examined in-depth (and the editor even has to devote several introductory paragraphs to explaining the sometimes contradictory definitions of “public” and “private,” or “domestic” and “independent,” all the while admitting that the volume's title doesn't accurately reflect the contents). But taken individually many of the articles are well worth reading and some are quite fascinating.

The first piece in the collection, by Michèle Cohen, shows that most advocates of education for girls in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England argued in favour of a “broad” curriculum. Unfortunately for these young ladies, the term “broad” really meant “superficial,” and most commentators took it for granted that women could not properly focus on difficult subjects for long periods. In the next chapter Dennis Dean discusses how the imposition of free and compulsory elementary education in late nineteenth-century Britain – traditionally accepted as a progressive measure – actually eliminated hundreds of locally established private working-class schools that had flourished for two generations. After that Gary McCulloch and Helen Penn examine the unsuccessful attempts to provide quality secondary and early childhood education for all people in twentieth-century Britain. McCulloch’s piece reveals that the central desire of most modern bureaucrats, in terms of secondary education, has been to somehow graft the advantages of the British private sector – whether by incorporation or imitation – onto the state educational system. Penn’s work, on the other hand, shows that for children under the age of seven there has been no real consensus on what path the government should take. While advocates demand “neither watered down schooling nor a commercial baby park,” British parents are forced to rely on a hodge-podge of private day nurseries, volunteer playgroups, and child-minding services. Other very valuable pieces in this collection include Lesley Hall’s examination of the delicate public/private line trod by advocates of sex education in British schools. From the “stamens and pistils” enthusiasts of the mid-1890s, sex educators have naturally faced resistance from prudes but periodic crises – in particular over various sexually transmitted diseases – have led to haphazard advances. Another fascinating item is presented by Susan Williams, who offers a revisionist perspective on how and why girls have been educated within the home. She notes that essential domestic survival skills – once handed down over the generations despite being consistently denigrated in the world of formal pedagogy – are now in real danger of disappearing as both parents have sought paid employment in the working world. Having recently watched as my eldest child tackled pancake-making while being completely oblivious to the associated dangers of cooking (apparently the conventional laws of flammability are suspended near her), this article certainly struck a chord.

The final section of the work includes articles that deal with events outside the United Kingdom. Peter Leuner and Mike Woolf look at how post-secondary education has increasingly become a global commodity with branch campuses and web-based schooling making national boundaries “fluid.” Geoffrey Sherington traces the tortuous path of secondary education in Australia from the creation of corporate schools in the 1800s, to state schools modelled on those examples, to the public comprehensives of the late twentieth century. William J. Reese provides some fascinating insights into the state of American education. He reveals that in the 1800s advocates of public schools saw them as serving the common good, but now they are regularly depicted as morally and physically dangerous places. Reese says the continuity has been in the perspectives of ordinary Americans who have always believed in Christianity and the marketplace. As the twentieth century wore on, and as God and prayer were gradually removed from the public school classroom, those who could afford it sought out private institutions that would still fulfil the original goals of the nineteenth-century public school advocates.

Most surprising of all, Richard Aldrich has taken editorial privilege to present us with the results of his personal genealogical pursuits. While I was initially prepared to dismiss this article, partly because it seemed to be the oddest of items in a collection of only partially affiliated works, I found myself jotting “This is good!” as marginalia. Aldrich differentiates between “private” family histories (usually done by amateurs and known only to a few members of that clan) and the far more “public” published history of families (done primarily by academics). His essential thesis is that the two should be combined. He proves this by showing how his father George Aldrich developed an interest in practical science from a childhood job racing up stairs to light gas lamps in apartments at the Peabody Buildings in London. By examining his father’s private and public education experiences the editor ties together the knowledge found in other chapters, including learning within the home, state-sponsored secondary schooling, and gendered curriculum. After reading this item, one can only conclude that Aldrich has made a rather lamentable editorial decision. By placing his own research in the centre of *Public or Private Education*, rather than in a concluding chapter, he negated a

chance to better bind together this collection of generally worthwhile, if at times tangentially related, histories.

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