Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

Johanna M. Selles, *Methodists and Women's Education in Ontario, 1836–1925*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996. Pp. 296. $39.95, cloth.

Religion is regaining its rightful place in Canadian history, while the history of women's education has for some time claimed its proper share of our attention. Thus, while its scope might at first appear to be somewhat narrow, this book deals with broader issues of interest to Canadian historians in general and to readers of this journal in particular.

Methodists and Women's Education is a comprehensive account of that subject over the ninety-year period from the founding of Upper Canada Academy until the creation of the United Church in 1925. Ranging from the early Methodist schools and seminaries for women, through the ladies' colleges of the later nineteenth century, to the first few decades of female enrolment at Victoria College, the author traces the working out of Methodist ideas about appropriate education for women. She also takes pains to delineate the successes and failures along the way, as religious commitment and educational goals were translated into institutional realities that sometimes fell short of their mark. Such central themes as the ambivalent views of Methodists about the purposes of women's education, the "conscious creation of a class-based gender ideology" (p. 11), and the relationship of denominational institutions to the developing state apparatus of education, provide a continuing thread through the narrative, and help to situate the educational efforts of a particular denomination within their wider social and intellectual milieu. Chapter 5, "School Experience at the Ladies' Colleges," which discusses their ideology and curricula, provides a cogent example of an exposition and analysis informed by these themes.

Perhaps the greatest strength of the book, however, lies in its careful and detailed reconstruction of the experience of education for both students and teachers. As Selles notes, the sources are often elusive and fragmentary; much has been lost, and what remains must be read through contemporary assumptions and masculine perspectives. However, she makes the most of the extant documentation, working from church and secular newspapers, institutional records, private papers, diaries, photographs, sermons, and the like, to reconstruct her subject.

Early nineteenth-century female education under Methodist auspices, in Ontario as elsewhere, took place in seminaries of varying duration, stability, and direction, and was intended to prepare girls, in settings reproducing the

Christian upbringing and parental supervision of their families, for their future roles as wives and mothers. Much of the material describing this stage is familiar—Chapter 2, for example, examines Upper Canada Academy, the Hurlburts' schools in Cobourg and then Toronto, and the Van Normans' schools in Cobourg and later Hamilton—but it is put in the larger context of the early seminary movement for women, and with a sense of how these early beginnings laid the groundwork for later denominational efforts.

We then turn to two different kinds of educational models, exemplified by Albert College, on the one hand, which offered a co-educational education, and institutions like the Wesleyan Ladies' College, Alma College, and Ontario Ladies' College, on the other, which had an exclusively female clientele and self-consciously female curriculum. Nevertheless, both models provided merely different ways of arriving at the same goal of an education uniquely tailored to women's needs. Offering serious academic studies as well as the "accomplishments" curriculum, the ladies' colleges prepared their charges for their future lives not only in the traditional female roles within the family, but for other vocations such as teaching. The aims of the co-educational model were not much different, but physical settings and curricular emphases varied. The schools reflected, as well, different visions, among the particular Methodists who sponsored them, of the education appropriate for women. As the author notes, however, over the entire period there was tremendous debate over what that meant: "Methodist educational organizers were ambivalent about the ends of this education" (p. 221); daughters were to learn how to fulfil their roles within Christian families, and perhaps how to earn a living, but the traditional gender ideology placed them firmly within a patriarchal sphere.

In the later nineteenth century, denominational schools faced the competition of a state-funded public education system that was not only open to girls, but cheaper. Some of these institutions survived, but only by relying on a relatively well-off clientele and thereby relinquishing a central role in the education system. However, with the gradual demarcation of schooling, both public and private, into distinct secondary and higher education levels, the university provided another educational setting for women.

Victoria College allowed them entry from the 1880s on, though Selles remarks that their admission "was less a distinct policy change than an extension of privileges to a hardy minority who were very careful not to intrude on male territory" (p. 7). This tentative and uncertain status was reflected in a curriculum that developed distinct institutions for female education: for example, the School of Household Science, and the Margaret Eaton School of Literature and Expression. A distinctive "woman's culture" developed as well. In two very interesting chapters, Selles examines the educational experience

of women at Victoria, including the important contributions of alumnae, and then focuses on Margaret Addison, who for many years played a central role as dean of the women's residence and then dean of women. Addison was a strong, if not universally loved, figure; her notions of the proper sort of college education for Methodist women occasionally brought her into conflict not only with the men, like Nathanael Burwash, who ran Victoria, but also with other equally strong-minded Methodist women who were involved in residence management and other matters.

It is always difficult to assess the impact of students' educational experiences on their lives. Selles is well aware of this challenge but has limited success in meeting it, though she provides interesting detail on the subsequent careers of Victoria women. As well, though an analysis of Methodist education for men lies beyond the scope of this account, it is clearly essential for a full understanding of the gendered nature of that experience. Nevertheless, as a comprehensive survey of Methodist schooling for women in Ontario, this book, with its helpful bibliography, makes a useful contribution to an important subject. It will prove both interesting and rewarding for all those who want to know more about the interplay of the histories of women, education, and religion in Ontario, and indeed beyond.

W. P. J. Millar
London, Ontario

Phillip McCann. *Schooling in a Fishing Society: Education and Economic Conditions in Newfoundland and Labrador, 1836–1986.* St. John's, Nfld.: Institute for Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1994. Pp. 277.

Newfoundland has long been regarded as the poor sister of Confederation. For many decades its thinly scattered outport population has, without conspicuous success, sought to confront the vagaries of the North Atlantic fishery while begrudgingly acquiescing in various resettlement and welfare schemes. A century ago well over two-thirds of the Newfoundland economy was based on the fishery; today well over two-thirds of it is devoted to the service sector. The fishery, nevertheless, continues to dominate the collective psyche of the Newfoundland people and most coastal Newfoundlanders think it inconceivable that fishing will cease to be the dominant force in their lives and livelihood. Foreign trawlers will be subdued; the cod stocks will return; normality will be restored.