

historique. Pour un public plus vaste, les textes colligés rappelleront à la mémoire la multiplicité, les nuances et la diversité des points de vue sur l'éducation ainsi que des dimensions du passé éducatif souvent occultées de nos jours. Il s'agit donc d'une belle opportunité d'appréhender la réalité historique directement, soit par les acteurs qui ont façonné l'évolution de l'éducation et de la société québécoise. Claude Corbo continue ainsi de jouer un important rôle en éducation en faisant connaître au plus grand nombre la richesse de son histoire.

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Eric Damer. *Discovery By Design: The Department of Mechanical Engineering of the University of British Columbia, Origins and History: 1907-2001*. Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2002. Pp. 220.

So little has been written on the history of engineering in Canada that those of us who work in the field are always grateful when new work is published, and such is the case with this new, commissioned history by Vancouver historian of education Eric Damer. It is not an entirely satisfying work – more on account of omissions than errors – but it is useful nonetheless, and the shortcomings in the book, some of them anyway, seem to owe more to a lack of source material than the author's missteps.

The book starts off too lean and ends up too rich. The early years of the department are told not nearly as fully as one would like, and in fact are covered so sparsely that the basics barely emerge. The department was born as a part of "McGill BC," the branch of McGill University established (by the province of B.C., it appears) in Vancouver in 1906. This has always struck me as an intriguing element in the pre-World War One "Canadianization" of western Canada, but the few paragraphs here shed little light on the subject. Who or what were the forces behind it, and how the deal was struck between B.C. and McGill, are neither explored nor explained. Furthermore, some of the basic facts of the early years, such as how many students attended or graduated from the department, and whether students

had to move to Montreal to finish their program, are lacking. Even more bothersome, by concentrating on the department alone, the relationship between it and the faculty and college of which it was a part is left unclear. Presumably the author lacked sources for this period of the department's history, but he still might have told a fuller, clearer story.

There are also a few points of interpretation in the early sections of the book that could be better handled. Damer mentions "ties between the department and local industry" (p. 26) but provides no evidence other than a newly appointed professor in 1913 being personally related to a prominent Vancouver capitalist; when the point is raised again (p. 44), we read only of more such connections. Without any evidence beyond the personal – such as local industry employing graduates, or local businesses providing funds – the argument falls short. Connections between the department and the early engineering professionalization movement could also benefit from more substance, but here the author is limited by a lack of published literature. He draws on Rod Millard's *The Master Spirit of the Age*, but the central-Canadian focus of that book limits its use to B.C. And a brief section on the British Columbia Technical Association, though fascinating, requires a fuller explanation. It is surprising that the association addressed "engineers" without using the word in 1920 – as Damer suggests it did – for who was and who was not an engineer was fairly well established by this time.

The book is strongest in the central sections covering the full establishment and growth of the department before and after the Second World War. Such matters as the relationship between school training and professional apprenticeships – something central to the history of the professions – and the growth of research in the department are quite well handled. The department's attempt to resolve the theory/practice dichotomy by allowing students to choose between research and practice streams is fascinating and well told (pp. 86-88). One senses, however, that there might have been more conflict than this telling reveals. The resignation of Department Head Herbert Vickers in 1936 over the refusal of the university to hire research-oriented academic staff, for example, is a tantalizing anecdote, but it passes without authorial comment (p. 60).

The final chapter of the book, "New Directions 1980-2001," swamps the reader with details of the student and staff research programs and their various funding sources without providing

much comment on what it all means. It is more of a digest than a history. It might be useful to future historians as an intellectual artifact, for it well reflects the preoccupation with research funds and their sources in today's academic culture, but it seems a little out of place in a history. One should not be too hard on Damer, however. He is not the first historian to founder on the rocks of "contemporary history," especially that written under the eyes of the participants, and the detailed material might well be of interest to some.

One overall important shortcoming, to this reviewer, and perhaps to other academic historians, is its complete lack of connection with the literature in the history of engineering. This field does not have a large historiography, but the few works in it are rich with explanatory ideas and concepts. Yet Damer's book makes no effort to use, challenge, or add to the literature. It includes not a single reference to such standard US authors as Edwin Layton, Terry Reynolds, Walter Vincenti, and Bruce Seeley, whose work has defined the field. Why this should be so can only be surmised – perhaps the author was instructed to work this way with a view to a non-academic audience. But whether it is due to the terms of work, limitations of space, or the author's lack of awareness of the subject, the result is that the relevance of the book to a scholarly audience is greatly reduced.

One feature of the book that struck me is how closely it resembles my own recent work on the history of the University of Toronto's Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering, also a commissioned history. The parallels are uncanny, almost eerie – from the opening point that the department was a product of a provincial government eager to promote provincial development, through the theory/practice debate and the growing importance of research, to the internationalization of the student body and the increasing enrolment of women. Even the illustrations in the text are strikingly similar – an early twentieth-century examination, a student-designed environmental car from an international competition, women in a student engineering club in the 1990s. Assuming this has not resulted from an unwitting imitation, the similarity between the works is a telling reminder that the forces at work shaping Canadian engineering education were the same in the east as in the west, and, furthermore, that if institutions seek explanations for their historical development in the characters and circumstances within their own walls they will be missing much of importance.

What we have is a brief, readable, tightly focused chronicle of the development of one department in one engineering school, the value and shortcomings of which flow directly from what it is.

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Brian J. Low. *NFB Kids – Portrayals of Children by the National Film Board of Canada, 1939-1989*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University, 2002. Pp. 288.

NFB Kids reminds us that the films of the NFB are an incredibly rich reserve of visual documents for social historians. Historians interested in childhood, in particular, have much to gain from surveying the vast array of representations of Canadian children's lives – everything from health, school, citizenship, First Nations, the Inuit and the north, immigration, sex education and sexual abuse, are spotlighted in the NFB catalogue. Low's work marks a useful "take one" on this important primary source material.

NFB Kids is perhaps best thought of as a guide to the array of material available in the NFB catalogue concerning children from 1939 to 1989. Low surveys virtually every film in the fifty-year period, setting his lens on those that concern or feature children prominently. What Low finds is indeed fascinating. We see children vacationing around the country, going to school, overcoming disabilities, engaging with technology, working, solving problems, and overcoming hardships. Children are the focus of the films Low surveys and their concerns, at least as adults construct them, are highlighted.

Low attempts to make some sense of NFB portrayals of children by organizing the book into a "progressive narrative" on the nature of both the NFB society and its children. He focuses first on the original stewardship of NFB founder, John Grierson, and his tenacious commitment to promoting "democratic citizenship" through film. Grierson's original intention, to use film as a powerful tool of propaganda to convince Canadians about the benefits of the "co-operative state" (p. 28), remained at the centre of the NFB for decades. A subsequent chapter