

forcefully. Elsewhere, engagement in theoretical debates might alter a part of the argument.

In *Building the Educational State*, for example, Bruce Curtis emphasizes that school reform in mid-nineteenth-century Canada involved a simultaneous process of building the state. Invention of new forms of control and of relations between superiors and subordinates such as inspection, collection of statistical information, and examination, and the creation of new school districts undoubtedly form part of the story of inventing secondary (and other) education. They also, and importantly, made a major contribution to the invention of many novel procedures, administrative units, and institutions which we now associate with the modern state. It can be objected that Gidney and Millar's book is about schools and not the state. The problem is that much of the text, of necessity, deals with the relationship between the schools and the state. And while the authors stress, clearly and consistently, that there was no pre-existing secondary school gradually unfolding into a modern form, they often imply that a continuous modern state *did* exist alongside the ramshackle collection of contemporary educational arrangements. Yet the details of their narrative can be used to argue the opposite case: that it was the schools which pioneered many *modern* attributes of the state. Indeed, one of the key contentions of the book is that, faced with the inadequacies of traditional and familiar means of educational provision, Upper Canada's middle class adopted a simple but innovative solution: they put their

children on the rates, and thus created a significant new role for local government. A similar society-building approach is implicit elsewhere in the text. Discussions of exams and division of intellectual labour, for example, are directly and immediately concerned with the simultaneous process of transforming and inventing modern state institutions—as well as with constructing the middle class, and with the reshaping and re-inventing of gender and age relations.

None of these reservations, however, detract from the excellent scholarship of the authors. Their important, meticulously researched and produced book will bring joy to the hearts of practical historians, and provide a reliable source of information and inspiration to a much wider audience than those interested in Canadian schooling.

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Richard D. Brown. *Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. Pp. ix, 372, illus. \$55.95.

Thinking may let us know that we exist individually, but communication—with whom we talk, the information we exchange, and how we exchange it—lets us know that we exist socially. Richard D. Brown in

Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865 persuasively demonstrates that the patterns and processes of communication in past societies merit historical study. His overarching argument is that an information revolution occurred in early America that paralleled the political revolution in colonial and early national American society. Over the course of the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century the volume of information available to the general public expanded rapidly, in particular through the print medium, as newspapers were started and as American book and periodical publishing became economically viable and accessible to the non-elite. As a consequence, the elite lost much of its control over the dissemination of information which it had had when most of society's information flowed from and through ministers, magistrates, and merchants. The depersonalization and democratization of information diffusion, indeed its commercialization, gave an individual the ability to choose what information to consume.

Brown claims that "America had gone from a society where public information had been scarce, and chiefly under the control of the learned and wealthy few, to a society in which it was abundant and under no control other than the interests and appetites of a vast popular public of consumers" (p. 286). It seems to be a naive conclusion when we are all too aware of the manipulation of the media. As well, it is hard to know why buying or not buying a newspaper gives one any more control than listening or not lis-

tening to a local minister except that we are taught to believe that it does. And we need to know more about how colonial American elites withheld information from the general public before we can reasonably conclude that newspapers really circumvented elite control. The market may not have always been the handmaid of democracy that Brown in this book and his previous books would like us to believe.

The strength of the book, though, is not in the main argument but in the individual arguments of the case studies which make up the book. Through the case studies, Brown documents the information diffusion patterns used by merchants, lawyers, ministers, farmers, artisans, and women, how they changed over time, and how they fit into the larger communication patterns of American society. From these case studies Brown offers very provocative hypotheses for how information dissemination affects the formation of and relationships between classes and defines the social function of different professions such as clergy, lawyers, and merchants. For example, he argues that lawyers in the United States became very prominent in public affairs (more than half of all delegates to the Constitutional Convention were lawyers) because they had experience working beyond the locality in which they lived. Unlike ministers, who often had similar outside contacts, lawyers had no socially defined commitment to a rhetoric of social harmony and therefore had greater latitude to engage in public debate than did ministers or magistrates. They

were ideal spokespeople in the national political arena.

One of the virtues of this book is that it is provocative and raises many more questions than it answers. Brown notes that among the gentry in colonial Virginia a classical education could substitute for being well born or wealthy. Philip Fithian, the tutor of Robert Carter's children, estimated that his degree from the College of New Jersey in Princeton was the equivalent of \$10,000 in providing social status in Virginia. In Fithian's native New Jersey his degree had not nearly the same social value. Brown does not deal with education as a means of information diffusion, but the implication in the Fithian example is that education had very different social meanings in Virginia and New Jersey. Education as a means of information diffusion begs for further research. The title *Knowledge is Power* suggests that education would be used to give the young information which would empower them, but education is also a means of socializing children which is not always empowering.

In the chapter on women and communication, Brown places a heavy emphasis on rising literacy among women and their subsequent access to the expanding world of print. Brown argues that this change reduced the reliance of women on husbands and fathers for information beyond the home. But one might argue that it was just a shift from men within the home to men outside the home. The rise in literacy and reading among women may initially have given men more control over the information that women received. Women were not in-

involved in publishing and only a few wrote for publication. What little they wrote was screened by men before publication, what women read had been screened by men before it reached the market, and it was further subject to the screening of fathers and husbands when it entered the home. The print medium initially may not have enhanced the status of women.

The major weakness of *Knowledge is Power* is that most of the case studies are from the northern colonies and states, in particular New England. The representation of Southerners is very limited. Chapter Two on the eighteenth-century Tidewater gentry is based on William Byrd II's diary. One of the three women in the chapter "Daughters, Wives, Mothers" was a Virginian, Lucy Breckenridge. Southerners are otherwise not discussed in detail. But the Byrd case alone should make one hesitant to draw conclusions about the national culture based on an overrepresentation of New England. Brown argues that the patterns of communication which developed in the Chesapeake region helped to create the Tidewater gentry, which was very different from the urban gentry of Boston described in the previous chapter based on the life of Samuel Sewall, a merchant and public official. If the first two chapters, one based on a Yankee, the other based on a Virginian, are so different then we might question whether Brown can justify an argument about a shared American pattern of information diffusion when he later draws so heavily on New England sources. It has become almost trite to complain that New England—or even

the North—is not representative of the entire United States, but in terms of *Knowledge is Power* the complaint is warranted.

It is inconceivable that any thoughtful reader could put down *Knowledge is Power* without readjusting one's thinking on how information flows shape the social structure. As well, the possibilities for further research virtually leap from the pages. Music and storytelling as forms of information diffusion are untouched. Information diffusion from one generation to the next is unexplored whether as formal schooling or the learning which goes on inside the home. Studies of communication patterns within the military or in a factory would illuminate the operations of those hierarchical structures. Brown has written an enormously stimulating and readable book; however much one may disagree with his arguments, it is hard not to be persuaded that the historical study of information diffusion justifies this book and many more.

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Donald Warren, ed. *American Teachers: Histories of a Profession at Work*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989. Pp. 472.

This is an ambitious volume. The subtitle conveys at once the intentions

of the editor and his board: their book is to be no simple or unitary story focusing on one line of argument or single interpretation. Indeed it is hard to imagine a collection of essays by leading American scholars in the history of teachers that could be anything but the multiple *histories* that the title proclaims. Perhaps somewhat coyly, the title also straddles the line on the contested question of whether teachers have been professionals or workers. Teaching is a profession, the title tells us; on the other hand we are looking at a "profession at work."

Of course no title can ever convey everything that is in a book and this volume is no exception, going well beyond the vexed questions of professionalization and the work of the schoolroom to consider an immense variety of themes in the history of American teachers. Believing, as Donald Warren argues in his introduction, that educational historians, educational reformers, and teachers all need each other, the editor and his board were clearly concerned to bring before a wider public the important work in teacher history that has marked the last decade or so of American historical research in education. In this they have succeeded. In the first section, "Those Who Taught—and Why," John L. Rury and Susan B. Carter examine the social characteristics of teachers over time and the incentives and rewards that brought men and women into this work. Section Two, entitled "Teacher Workplaces," deals with teachers of kindergartens and primary schools, the country school, urban elementary schools, and public high schools, but