

Consumers in the Bush: Shopping in Rural Upper Canada by Douglas McCalla

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trepreneurs, real estate tycoons, and planning visionaries, for better or for worse, reinvented Toronto with social housing projects, super-highways, sprawling suburbs, and shopping plazas” (199), underscores the reality that contemporary debates over development have a long and messy history in Toronto.

These discussions, while absorbing, point to a shortcoming in Levine’s narrative approach: if Toronto is personified as a biographical persona, it is clearly male. From Simcoe to Art Eggleton, Mackenzie to Ford, George Brown to Conrad Black, and “Big Daddy” Gardiner to Megacity Mel Lastman, those credited with shaping the city’s destiny are nearly all men. Even renowned urbanist Jane Jacobs, whom Levine does credit in a chapter titled “Jane’s Disciples,” is shunted aside in favour of a discussion of the longstanding acrimony between John Sewell and Paul Godfrey. We know Toronto best in its early days through the diary of Elizabeth Simcoe, but it is her husband’s declaration, “Here let there be a city,” that Levine emphasizes. In other places women are reduced to their supportive and occasionally biological roles: population growth in the city’s early years is credited to “the prolific nature of York’s women, who married young and quickly thereafter had lots of children” (28). Levine does note that by the 1970s “talented female journalists, and other women, were breaking through barriers,” but adds that “the only women who truly seemed to count... were the wealthy wives of the city’s

business elite” (273)—and immediately devotes paragraphs to them.

Similarly, Levine’s resolutely chronological structure, which means that fascinating subjects (particularly those dealing with immigration, social conditions and the conditions of everyday life) are introduced, dropped and returned to, is somewhat disjointed. This is especially unfortunate given that these analyses are Levine’s strongest and most innovative (particularly outstanding are an account of Thornton and Lucie Blackburn, ex-slaves who successfully ran the city’s first taxi company, and discussions of the immigrant “slums” of Corktown and St. John’s Ward). A more thematic approach might have improved the book’s continuity and highlighted the originality of Levine’s reporting.

Levine concludes by invoking Toronto’s status as an “Alpha City”—a term aptly underscoring the city’s identity not only as a confident (some might say arrogant) centre, capable of throwing its economic weight around, but also as a place where something new is always unfolding. As Levine shows in this rich and fascinating book, beginnings are what have always drawn people to Toronto: the sense of possibility, the promise of growth.

Amy Lavender Harris,
Award-winning author of *Imagining Toronto*
(Mansfield Press)

Consumers in the Bush *Shopping in Rural Upper Canada*

By Douglas McCalla

Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2015. Xiv+296 pp. \$100.00 hardcover. ISBN 978-0-77354-499-4. \$ 34.95 softcover. ISBN 978-0-77354-500-7

Here is a book which offers in extraordinary detail the consequences of pursuing a very simple idea. Upper Canadian

general stores, like all small businesses, kept careful business accounts. Each store kept a day book, a record of every transaction made

in the course of a day: each customer's name, the quantity and price of each product purchases, and the total sale. Over a period of time, these daybooks thus recorded thousands of separate purchases made by hundreds of individual customers. These daybooks are primary sources worthy of study, although few, if any, scholars have previously tried to do so.

University of Guelph Professor Douglas McCalla—best known for his comprehensive economic history of Upper Canada, *Planting the Province*—set out to mine these deposits of data for an economic study of Upper Canada, “an experiment in bringing retail accounts fully into the study of consumption” (20). Business accounts have been shown little interest by historians, he comments; if used at all, they were “cited anecdotally rather than exploited systematically” (18).

Aided by a team of (graciously acknowledged) assistants, McCalla studied the daybook entries of general stores in seven different rural villages in two different regions of eastern Upper Canada. Collecting from each the data for a full year—for three of them, for two different years—resulted in a total of ten separate years, from 1808 to 1861, to be subjected to analysis. For each store year, a representative sample of customers was selected for study. This resulted in a massive, but nonetheless manageable amount of data—a total of more than 30,000 separate financial transactions by 750 different families.

Compiling and analyzing this data produced 36 different tables plus four appendices (more than 60 pages) for study. One example: Appendix A, an itemized list of all the goods purchased by five or more sample customers. All these commodities are sorted into 11 different categories; of these, “Textiles” are of 5 different types; of these “cottons” are of 16 different varieties; the first variety of “cotton” is “calico.” There are thus some 400 separate items. Columns for each list the unit

of purchase (e.g. “yard” “pair” “pound”), the year first sold, the number of stores in which it was sold, and the total number of purchasers.

But reader, take heart. All this statistical information is prefaced by a clear, thoughtful, and altogether humane narrative which explores and explains the implications of the whole study. McCalla gently suggests that many of our beliefs and assumptions about the rural settlement of our province need to be re-examined. Among them:

There is little evidence of bartering—goods were not traded but sold for clearly set and stable prices.

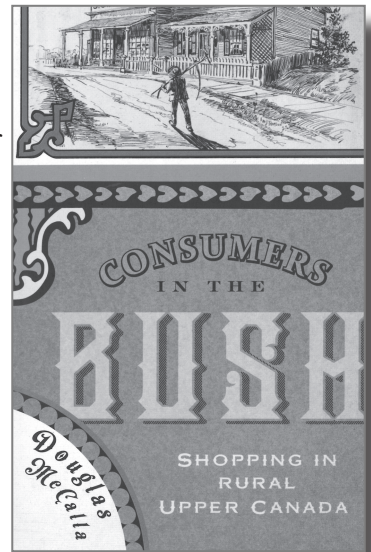
1. Even from the earliest period, settlers were heavily dependent upon the wide variety of imported goods that were made available for purchase.

2. Yet buyers were able to patronize more than one store; “rural Upper Canadian men and women routinely participated in the marketplace in multiple locations and through numerous points of access” (149).

3. A great range of tools and other hardware was commonly purchased—they were not too expensive for common use.

4. Some household products—cups and plates—were regularly purchased; others—knives, forks, spoons, dishes—less so; but all were indeed purchased in the earliest years.

5. Of the tens of thousands of transactions, there was not one recorded purchase of chocolate. On the other hand, salt seems



to have been the only absolute necessity.

6. For tobacco, tea, and sugar, there was little change in consumption patterns in the course of fifty years.

7. Alcohol was commonly purchased; although there was some decline over the years, many customers continued to purchase it; there is no evidence for seasonal alcohol purchase patterns; many alcohol customers also bought tea.

The epigraph for the first chapter is a quotation from Catharine Parr Trail's *Backwoods of Canada*: "We begin to get reconciled to our Robinson Crusoe sort of life..." For McCalla, it is this notion, that each early settler family in Upper Canada was, "isolated, surrounded by the unknown, deprived of the

usual supports of civilization, and fending for itself," (8) that this work seeks to contradict. Even from the earliest years, settler families were part of an interconnected world-wide economic enterprise.

In his penultimate paragraph, McCalla warns: "As the main chronological focus of Canadian historical research shifts even farther forward in time, the settlement era can easily recede in historians' field of vision, becoming an abstract, timeless world 'before' (for example, before markets or industrial capitalism or modernity). This book offers a different perspective" (152).

Chris Raible,
Creemore, Ontario

We Share Our Matters (Teionkwakhashion tsi niionkwariho:ten)

Two Centuries of Writing and Resistance at Six Nations of Grand River

By Rick Monture

Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015. 228 pp. \$27.95 paperback. ISBN 978-0-88755-767-5. \$20.00 eBook or digital download. ISBN not provided. (www.uofmpress.ca)

At the community book launch in the Spring of 2015, the theatre of the Woodland Cultural Centre in Brantford was standing room only, while hundreds of people from Six Nations feted Monture with rounds of applause and a standing ovation. Clearly, they appreciate Monture's efforts to publish what he calls an intellectual history of the Six Nations of Grand River. While numerous scholars from outside Six Nations have researched and written about the community's history, myself included, very few from within it have done so and published for a wider audience. Monture's book is especially important for this reason. He is sharing not only his extensive research and analysis, but also his knowledge of his community's history from an insider perspective, for the community itself and the wider public.

We share our matters is based on Monture's dissertation in English, and as such, focuses especially on the literary history of the community, although it includes analysis of numerous other sorts of documents and publications. The book is made up of six body chapters which proceed chronologically and thematically throughout the history of the Six Nations at Grand River, beginning with their arrival at Grand River after the American Revolution, and ending with films made by Haudenosaunee artist Shelly Niro in 2012. Monture's focus is on "how our leaders, intellectuals, writers and artists have consistently reiterated—in English—our ancient philosophies in the context of the political and social environment of their day to build upon the central belief structures of traditional thought in profound and creative ways" (218). He