

1812-1814 are easily the strongest and should be recommended to young people. The other five volumes are not impressive and should not be recommended.

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## WOMEN IN CANADIAN HISTORY

**Her Story: Women from Canada's Past.** Susan E. Merritt. Vanwell Publishing, 1993. 172 pp. \$14.95 paper. ISBN 1-55125-000-4. **Her Story II: Women from Canada's Past.** Susan E. Merritt. Vanwell Publishing, 1995. 172 pp. \$14.95 paper. ISBN 1-55125-000-4.

Despite the publication over the last two decades of a burgeoning number of Canadian historical biographies aimed at young adolescents, women are still under-represented in literature that focuses on male explorers, military leaders and politicians. The two volumes of Susan Merritt's *Her Story: Women from Canada's Past* attempt to redress the imbalance through "a celebration of the richness and variety of women's lives."

The books each profile sixteen women who share few common characteristics other than a birth date before 1900 and lives of courage and determination that facilitated their endurance in the face of sorrow, or triumph in the face of adversity. The deliberate inclusion of women from different time periods, ethnic backgrounds, vocations, and provinces illustrates the diversity of women's contributions to Canada's heritage.

In volume I, Merritt's protagonists include a doctor, writer, and social crusader, as well as women who defended forts, delivered slaves to freedom, and conveyed military intelligence. As always, it is possible to quibble with the choice of women studied in a collection such as this. Biographies of six of the women were already accessible to children eleven or twelve and up in E. Blanche Norcross's *Pioneers Every One* (1979). While it is commendable that four native women and two black women are portrayed, it is troublesome that only two French women are deemed worthy of inclusion. Given the importance of the role played by religious women in health care and education in Quebec, either Marie de l'Incarnation or Marguerite Bourgeoys would be a logical choice. Scottish heroine Flora Macdonald's story would be more appropriate if she had achieved something noteworthy during the three years she lived in Nova Scotia.

Although occasionally marred by inconsistent spelling, faulty punctuation, and the claim that it is 22,000 kilometres from Seattle to Alaska, the historically-accurate narrative is written in clear and engaging prose. The author, however, tends to focus on the virtues of her characters at the expense of a more realistic depiction of their personalities. For example, Madeleine de Verchères is described as a "symbol of valour and determination." No mention is made of her

propensity to be an ill-tempered braggart who mistreated her habitants. The book is attractively packaged with eighty photographs, drawings, and maps. Unfortunately, the black-and-white reproductions of Emily Carr's art lessen their impact and effectiveness. Brief reading lists are provided, as is a useful time line of the accomplishments of the women chronicled. Some weaknesses aside, *Her Story I* should inspire interest in the history of Canadian women and may be considered a worthwhile addition to children's libraries.

The positive response to Merritt's first volume prompted the publication of sixteen more short biographies of accomplished Canadian women in *Her Story II*. The author repeats her commitment to being sensitive to regional and racial issues by telling the stories of First Nation, black, and European women from all provinces and the Northwest Territories. Given Merritt's efforts to be as inclusive as possible, francophone Quebeckers are conspicuous by their complete absence. The women portrayed in this second volume are somewhat more obscure than those found in the first, but this in no way diminishes the significant but varied roles these women played in the development of Canadian society.

Most of the stories are quite inspiring and compelling reading. Merritt carefully describes the historical circumstances and societal expectations of women in lucid and absorbing detail. Some, such as midwife and healer Marie-Henriette Lejeune Ross, performed what were considered traditionally female roles. However, most of Merritt's characters flouted societal conventions. Eunice Williams, a Puritan captured by the Mohawks as a child, willingly remained a member of the First Nation as an adult. Dr. Maude Abbott became the world's authority on congenital heart disease but was declined a professorship at McGill University. Nuclear Physicist Harriet Brooks Pitcher died prematurely through her work on radioactivity with Marie Curie. Agnes Macphail was the first woman member of Parliament, but was ostracized by her fellow male members. Pitseolak, an Inuit, became one of Canada's best-known graphic artists despite never drawing a picture before the age of fifty-four.

*Her Story II* is free of some of the annoying mistakes of its predecessor. Merritt has once again produced a well-illustrated and informative book that allows children to read about women's lives that would otherwise be inaccessible to them.

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#### MINOR BIOGRAPHY

**Martha Black: Gold Rush Pioneer.** Carol Martin. Douglas and McIntyre, 1996. 96 pp. \$8.95 paper. ISBN 1-55054-245-1.

Martha Purdy, who later became Martha Black, was a wealthy woman from Chicago. Her husband built a chain of laundries and the Purdy family lived in style and comfort. They were part of Chicago's social elite. In the 1890s Martha